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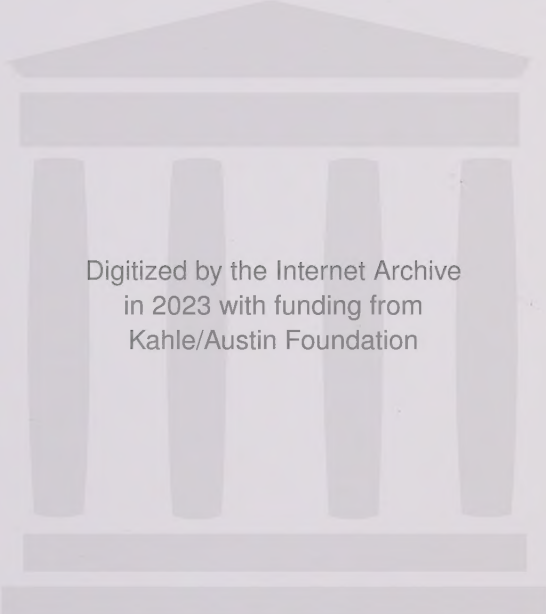
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THE  
KEMBLE



PERCY FITZGERALD

# THE KEMBLEMES

Volume Two



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*Kemble*

# THE KEMBLE S

AN ACCOUNT OF THE KEMBLE FAMILY,

INCLUDING THE LIVES OF

MRS. SIDDONS,

AND HER BROTHER

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A., F.S.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF GARRICK," "PRINCIPLES OF COMEDY," ETC.

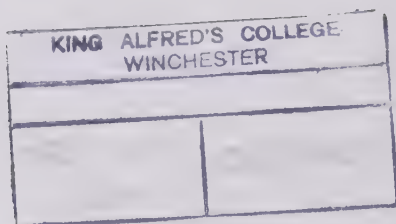
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VOL. II.

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# THE KEMBLEs.

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## CHAPTER I.

### BEREAVEMENT.

THE eager fancy for German sentiment, which was then steadily increasing, might seem to us almost incomprehensible. The sickly inversion of all moral relations which pervaded it ought to have been foreign to British tastes, as we can see from attempts made in our day to introduce pieces of the *Paul Forrestier* or the *Dame aux Camélias* to the English stage; the experiment has been often tried, but has excited no sympathy. It is true that sentimental comedy came over to us from France some forty years before, and appeared to obtain a strong hold upon the town, until a blow was struck at it by one of Goldsmith's comedies. But it was then chiefly confined to the higher orders of society, with whom the novels of Crébillon and the "Sentimental Journey" were in high favour. The German senti-

ment was of a different order, and indeed scarcely deserved the name of sentiment. Hopeless despair, without chance of retrieving the past—a kind of modern Fate, akin to that of the Greeks, which there was no opposing; love as hopeless; murder, not from revenge or passion, but from the very refinement of affection: these were the awful elements to be mixed in the melodramatic bowl. Yet though they excited the wit and ridicule of Canning and his friends, there was an earnestness and sincerity in working out the situations, absurdly involved as were the human passions displayed, not unlikely to interest the English mind. And this will be particularly observed in that extraordinary play of Kotzebue's, *The Stranger*, which was now brought forward.

So much ridicule, in burlesques and criticism, has been heaped upon it, that it becomes a little hard to judge it impartially. Any one seeing it for the first time, however, must pronounce it a most powerful play—distinct and single in purpose—simple in its tone, and absorbing in its interest. The sombre figure of the Stranger, vulgarized by the exaggeration of inferior actors, may seem to offer an irresistible invitation to ridicule; and the amusing description

in "Nicholas Nickleby" of a performance at a country theatre only expressed with agreeable satire what fell within the experience of many a playgoer. But with the two characters in the hands of fine players, the stern and logical fashion in which the one purpose of the piece is worked out, affords the highest opportunity for the finest tragic acting. The discussion as to its moral character, which continued up to the present generation, now seems ludicrously exaggerated, after the deliberate outrages on decency of the French stage. It was urged that the spectacle of frailty, condoned under the most touching conditions of penitence and suffering, might provoke a sympathy full of danger from the official morality of the community. But the truth is, the finale is no more than the logical consequence of the situations of the piece, which the ridiculous alteration sometimes made, to satisfy scruples, of the two parties walking away in opposite directions, completely destroyed. Indeed, as Mr. Campbell says, this logical conclusion would amount to forgiveness, which none could deny to be Christian, but not to condonation, which would be quite a different matter.

Kemble had already discovered that a special department of his talent lay in finished pictures of despair,

suffering, or abandonment, such as he made so effective in *The Wheel of Fortune*, or *The Mountaineers*. *Penruddock* and *Octavian*, with *The Stranger*, belong to one family ; but the last he developed in a character of surprising force, dignity, and interest.\* His sister made Mrs. Haller tender and effective ; but she was eclipsed by the grandeur of her companion. It would almost seem that she was beginning to lose her old spirit, and that the conventionality which is certain to oppress players who have been long at their work, was now coming over her. It was amazing what extraordinary German extravagances were now brought forward in obedience to this taste. The accommodating Kembles lent their talents to the most childish and even ludicrous complications of emotion, while even Thomas Morton did not disdain to season so

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\* The original stage directions of the German play are highly characteristic of the much-ridiculed German style :—

*“ Stranger. (Advances into the room with a serious bow.)*

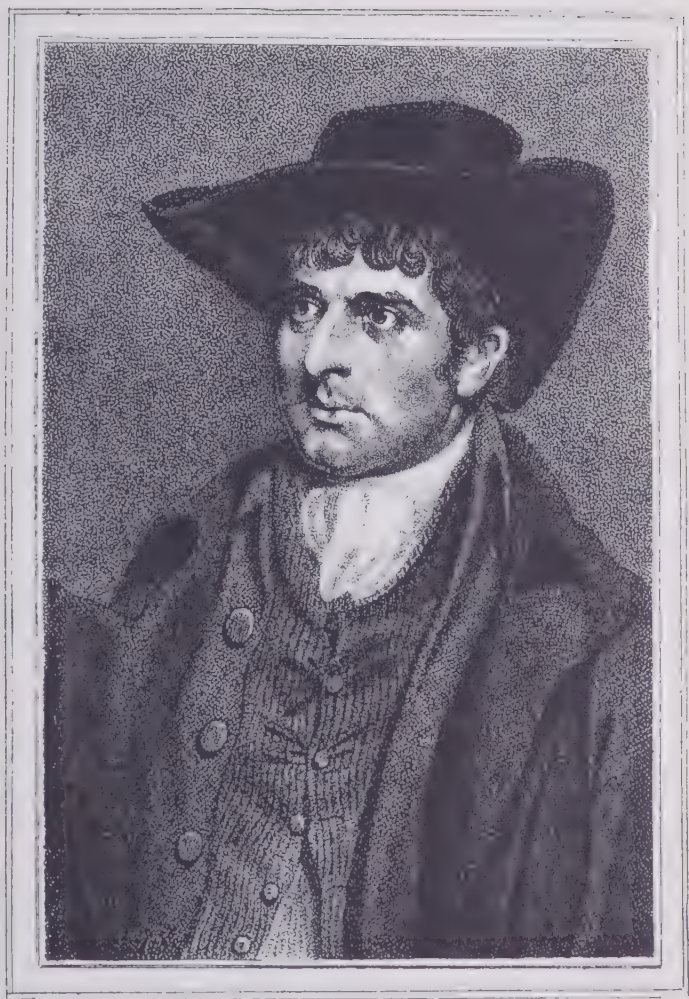
*Count. (Goes toward him with open arms.)*

*Eulalié. (Perceives him : utters a loud cry, and swoons.)*

*Stranger. (Casts a look at her ; with horror and astonishment in his gestures, he rushes off the stage.)*

*Count. (Looks after him with astonishment.)*

\*(The Countess and the Major are employed with *Eulalié*.)”



*A. P. Hemble*





admirable a comedy as *Speed the Plough* with "bloody knives" and clothes, laid up by wicked Baronets for years as evidence of their own guilt. But the most effective importation from that country was a translation of Kotzebue's *Pizarro*, a piece beside which the most daring rhapsodies of the present transpontine stage seem tame and even rational. It is surprising to think that this was embellished with inconceivable rant and fustian by the same hand which had penned the delicate conceits of the *School for Scandal*. More wonderful still was it to find Kemble and his sister playing characters of such a description—the former defying enemies, fighting "terrific" combats, carrying a child across a bridge, and ranting fearfully; while Mrs. Siddons lent all her grand strength to Elvira, a sort of "camp follower"—a character that was below her dignity. She had naturally a disinclination to play it, and during the first part of the performance Sheridan was thoroughly dissatisfied with his actress. "She would never fall into the character," he restlessly said. But before the close he changed his opinion; the town rushed to see the piece; Lawrence painted a spasmodic picture of Kemble as Rolla; thirty thousand copies of the play were sold, for the "fine writing," and it was

acted for thirty-one nights—considered then an enormous run. This view of German sentiment has made us anticipate a little. But a regular catalogue of plays produced, and described in their order, makes dreary reading; and we have purposely dealt with those only which illustrate some fashion of the time, or some change in style of the two great players.

But the domestic troubles of the actress were now gathering steadily. It was hard indeed for her to put spirit into her playing, when she had to hurry from the stage to attend on her sick daughter Maria, now passing into a rapid decline. In addition to her theatrical labours she had to hurry about the country, trying this place and that, in the hope of staying the fatal encroachments of the disease; but no change was found to be of any use. Her own constitution was also becoming enfeebled, and a curious evidence of its weakness was given one night when she was playing in *Tamerlane*. It was one of those inflated, energetic parts, which suit the strong-lunged player, and she was delivering these boisterous lines, which almost seem as if taken from a burlesque:—

“Patience! Distraction! Blast the tyrant! blast him,  
Avenging lightnings!—snatch him hence, ye fiends!  
Love! Death! Moneses! —”

when she swooned away, and her head was heard to strike on the floor, which brought a rush from the pit and boxes on to the stage. With these distresses there were other inconveniences.

“I am acting again,” she wrote to a friend in 1796, “but have much difficulty to get my money. Sheridan is certainly the greatest phenomenon that nature has produced for centuries.\* Our theatre is

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\* It has been a mystery to Moore and other biographers, and is satisfactory proof of his amazing powers over his fellow-men, how with only a few thousand pounds in hand, and the balance made up of fine words, he should have been able to purchase what was worth 70,000*l.* I have been able to discover the stages of this wonderful arrangement. At Garrick’s retirement the property was valued at 70,000*l.*, distributed into fourteen shares of 5000*l.* each. Garrick held one half, Lacy the other. The latter had, however, mortgaged his portion for nearly its value—viz., 31,000*l.* Sheridan, with Doctor Ford and Linley, then purchased Garrick’s moiety for 35,000*l.*, Ford finding 15,000*l.*, Linley and Sheridan 10,000*l.* each. Here was the first difficulty—as to Sheridan’s finding such a sum; but it has been ascertained from Mr. Wallis, Garrick’s solicitor, that Sheridan could only furnish 1500*l.*, and that the balance was advanced by Garrick on personal securities of Sheridan’s, probably on the two shares themselves. This debt, however, he contrived to discharge in three or four years, out of the profits of the theatre. Next, wishing to have yet greater control, he purchased Lacy’s moiety for 45,000*l.*, taking over the mortgage liability, and paying Lacy and another two annuities of 500*l.*, with 4000*l.* in cash; to raise which sum he transferred his original two shares to the other proprietors at an

going on, to the astonishment of everybody. *Very few of the actors are paid, and all are vowing to withdraw themselves; yet still we go on: Sheridan is certainly omnipotent.*" Yet this was only the beginning of those successful devices which were to carry him on in office for many years to come. It was evident, however, that she had succeeded in extracting a good portion of what was due to her. Two years more passed by, and again the arrears mounted up, and this time she seemed to feel there was no hope of recovering them. "I can get no money from the theatre," she wrote in despair; "my precious 2000*l.* are swallowed up in that drowning gulf, from

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increased price. The interest on Garrick's claim was 2200*l.* a year, which would represent a capital of about 25,000*l.* Later on, Sheridan bought Ford's share for 17,000*l.*, and later, the Linleys. As the latter were indemnified by annuities on the theatre, we may presume the former to have been dealt with on the same terms. The elder Mathews declared that Lacy died in want from his annuity not being paid, and one of the Linleys told Mr. Moore that they too had received nothing. The only difficulty unexplained is, how Garrick's mortgage was paid off. I am inclined to believe that it remained a charge upon the theatre until paid by the subscriptions for the new house. This bit of financing does infinite credit to Sheridan's dexterity. This statement, put together from allusions in Garrick's letters, and a curious book published by "an octogenarian" of the Sheridan family, may fairly claim to be the first coherent account of the transaction.



which no plea of right or justice can save its victims." There was another victim, whom, to save from a premature death, she would have given more than her precious 2000*l*. Her daughter—she was a beautiful and interesting girl, whose face recalled the early beauty of her mother—was fast sinking into the grave. Something of an unhappy romantic attachment was said to have precipitated this catastrophe, and Lawrence, the painter, it was afterwards reported, after engaging her affections, had transferred his own to her sister.\*

This episode was really a most painful one. The painter found a sort of fascination in the family. He had made Mrs. Siddons' acquaintance in the old Bath days, and had there sketched her in a most characteristic picture, representing her in a hat with buckle and feathers, and a riding dress.† He was himself a person of singular attraction, but a thorough male coquette. It was said that he could hardly answer a simple invitation to dinner without giving his letter the air of a *billet-doux*, while his ordinary

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\* *Annual Biography*, "Mrs. Siddons," an account contributed by an intimate friend of the Kemble family.

† This was afterwards published in colours, and is exceedingly rare. He painted three generations of the family.

conversation with a lady at a party fell into low whispers and insinuating tones. With an uncertainty that seems almost contemptible, he allowed his wandering affections to fluctuate between the sisters. Everything was done to fix his attachment; the mother even engaged to pay his debts, but it was in vain. He was deeply affected when his victim had passed beyond the reach of trifling lovers, wore mourning to the day of his death, "used black wax," and exhibited a settled melancholy.

The only aim now was to soothe her last days; and the mother sent for the daughter of her old manager and friend, Tate Wilkinson, an amiable girl, for whom she had a regard. Her letter is almost piteous in the desperate earnestness of its entreaty:—

"My plans for this summer," she wrote to him, "are so arranged, that I have no chance of the pleasure of seeing you. The illness of my second daughter has deranged all schemes of pleasure as well as profit. I thank God she is better; but the nature of her constitution is such, that it will be long ere we can reasonably banish the fear of an approaching consumption. It is dreadful to see an innocent, lovely young creature daily sinking under the

languor of illness, which may terminate in death at last, in spite of the most vigilant tenderness. A parent's misery, under this distress, you can more easily imagine than I can describe ; but if you are the man I take you for, you will not refuse me a favour. It would *indeed* be a great comfort to us all, if you would allow our dear Patty to come to us, on our return to town in the autumn, to stay with us a few months. I am sure it would do my poor Maria so much good ; for the physician tells me she will require the same confinement and the same care the next winter. And, let it not offend the pride of my good friend, when I beg it to be understood that I wish to defray the expense of her journey. Do, dear soul ! grant my request. Give my kind compliments to your family, my love to my own dear Patty, and accept yourself the best and most cordial wishes of S. SIDDONS."

The daughters, too, joined in this request for a companion whom they loved. It was not likely to be refused ; and the country manager's daughter from that time never left Mrs. Siddons' house. They hurried to Clifton with the invalid. Meanwhile the actress had to pursue her professional labours, having to work hard to make up the money Mr.

Sheridan could not give her. She went to Plymouth, where she was found so popular that she had to extend her stay; and her husband describes with much satisfaction the attention they received:—

“To-morrow se’nnight we set off,” he wrote to Dr. Whalley, “not for Brighton, but London, for the season will be too far gone to think of the first place, to the grief only of poor Maria,—for Sally would rather go home than not; so Maria must submit, for she is in a minority. Had Mrs. Siddons been well (but alas! she is far from it) all would have been pleasant enough, for there has been quite an original mania as to the theatres. We have made some very pleasant visits, too; to the Government-house, Lord George and Lady Lennox’s, and met so many generals, colonels, and admirals, that Maria thought, had the French arrived, she must have been safe amongst them. But a far pleasanter party to her was to a most beautiful seat of a very handsome young Lord (Borrington) of four-and-twenty: his place is called Saltram, and a very fine house it is, with a very choice and expensive collection of pictures, chiefly bought by Sir Joshua Reynolds; the old lord employing him to go to any price, provided a bad picture did not come into

the house. We dined there with a large party on Thursday last."

This is characteristic of the man. In his head were running the images of "Lord George and Lady Lennox," the dining at Lord Borringdon's, &c. He was always "a poor creature," and furnished a large contribution to the troubles of his incomparable wife.

At last this poor child, whom the mother was making such frantic struggles to keep with her, was now to be snatched away. Her death took place on October 6th, 1798, and her mother wrote in distraction to a friend\*—"Although my mind is not yet sufficiently tranquillized to talk much, yet the conviction of your undeviating affection impels me to quiet your anxiety so far as to tell you that I am tolerably well. This sad event I have been long prepared for, and

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\* Maria Siddons was buried at Bristol, and the following rather theatrical epitaph placed over her grave:—

"IN THE VAULT OF THIS CHURCH LIES INTERRED  
MARIA SIDDONS,  
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE  
AGED NINETEEN.

"Early, bright, transient, chaste as morning dew,  
She sparkled, was exhaled—and went to heaven.—YOUNG."

bow with humble resignation to the decree of that merciful God who has taken to Himself the dear angel I must ever tenderly lament. I dare not trust myself further. Oh! that you were here, that I might talk to you of her death-bed,—in dignity of mind, and pious resignation, far surpassing the imaginations of Rousseau and Richardson, in their *Héloïse* and *Clarissa Harlowe*, for hers was, I believe, from the immediate inspiration of the Divinity.” This blow was to be soon followed by another as heavy, for there were already signs of a fatal decay in her second child’s health. Few people were to have the public prosperity and triumph so fairly balanced by domestic trials.



## CHAPTER II.

## RETIREMENT FROM DRURY LANE.

WITH the beginning of the season 1800-1 Kemble was restored to his old office of manager. This return surprised not a few who knew how disagreeable such a position must be in the pecuniary entanglements of the theatre, but Kemble accepted the post with the provident view of obtaining a share in the proprietorship of the theatre, or, if it were possible, the uncontrolled ownership. Sheridan entered eagerly into the scheme, and, in one of his most artful and insinuating letters,\* written with an apparent frankness, set a tempting prospect before the actor. He really thought it could not but be a negotiation for the advantage of both parties. He felt it was impossible for the management to be at all successful unless it was in the hands of one "who had a stake in the concern." Kemble was exactly the person suited to

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\* Given in Moore's "Life of Sheridan."

hold both interests, and might be assured of proper respect while *he* had any control, but he could not guarantee such consideration, for the proprietorship might pass "into vulgar and illiberal hands." The actor must have smiled over these platitudes as he thought how little respect he had already found under Sheridan's own direction. The receipts, it seems, were about 60,000*l.* a year, and this under a perishable patent and a lease which had at most but twenty years to run. He engaged that Kemble should have his salary as an actor, a payment of 500*l.* a year as manager, and further contracted solemnly to get his own bankers to advance him a sum of 10,000*l.* This was really a promising opening, for the theatre, as Kemble told his friends, was a sound business if properly worked; there was the example of Garrick, who entered on the same enterprise when it was in a far worse state of decay, and whose judicious direction raised it to the highest prosperity. But Kemble felt that it was indispensable to success that Sheridan should cease to be connected with the house, and, indeed, it requires only a slight acquaintance with the humours of the agreeable Brinsley to see that, if Kemble had been weak enough to yield to his seducing programme, the alliance would have brought about

the actor's ruin. Sheridan's object was chiefly to get "ready money" into the concern, and he had no notion of parting what was to him better than an estate. The negotiation, therefore, was dropped for the present.

Lookers-on, however, were vastly amused at Sheridan's ingenious tactics, and could hardly contain their admiration. It is really entertaining to turn from the official narrative of this negotiation to the spirited little sketch given by Mrs. Inchbald, and which seems to embody the true meaning of the affair. "He has now," she writes, "with only one short speech—but, I am told, appropriate both in sense and address, as if delivered by Milton's Devil—so infatuated all the Court of Chancery, and the whole town along with them, that everybody is raving against poor Hammersley—the banker and companion of Sheridan ; ALL except his most intimate friends, who know all particulars; they shake their heads, and sigh! Kemble, unable to get even 500*l.* out of 4000*l.*, packed up his boxes, gave a parting supper to his friends, and ordered his chaise at seven o'clock the next morning. As they were sitting down to supper, 'pop! he comes, like the catastrophe.' Mr. Sheridan was announced, Kemble and he withdrew to the study, and the next morning I heard

all was settled." Few could resist Sheridan's fascination.

Even his first fortnight's management was showing Kemble how hopeless was the idea of co-operating with such a man. Almost his first official act had to be to state bluntly that his sister would not "go on" in *King John* unless 50*l.* were sent to her that very day. He had to beg for common colours and a little canvas for the scene-painters. Later he declared there could be no pantomime at Christmas, and no revival of *Cymbeline*. *King John* was not played on the day it was announced, so we may presume the money was not forthcoming. His own demands were also left unnoticed, and, irritated at this neglect, the manager of the theatre had to write a note like the following to the treasury:—"It is now two days since my necessity made me send to you for 30*l.* My request has been treated with a disregard that I am at a loss how to account for. I certainly shall go and act my part to-night, but unless you send me a HUNDRED POUNDS before Thursday, I will not act on Thursday; and if you make me come a-begging again, it will be for TWO HUNDRED POUNDS before I set my foot in the theatre." These threatened "strikes" were as humiliating to the great players themselves as to the direc-

tors of the theatre, but it seemed to be their only remedy. By Sheridan, however, with his stock of adroit resources, these ordinary devices could be made powerless.

Under such halting conditions the theatre was not likely to prosper. A piece by Joanna Baillie—*De Montfort*—a dreary dramatic poem rather than drama, was brought out, and, as might be expected, obtained the doubtful certificate of honour, a "*succès d'estime*." Indeed, it seems strange how many experiments of this sort, and which turned out failures, were made by Kemble. But a leading actor is always exposed to the temptation of being blinded to the general merits of a piece, provided he finds a character which he thinks may suit him; though the mistakes made by Kemble are almost too numerous to be thus excused in this way. Here it was that Garrick showed a far nicer and more accurate judgment. The carpenters, however, exhibited a prodigy of skill which might rival the ambitious efforts of our day: "a church of the fourteenth century, with its nave, choir, and side aisles, magnificently decorated, and consisting of seven places in succession," I suppose one of the earliest specimens of "set" scenery.\*

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\* Sheridan, in one of the lively Parliamentary discussions on

But there was another circumstance which might have disquieted one less confident in his own gifts than Kemble. This was the appearance of one likely to prove a dangerous rival. During his sixteen years' career in town he had been singularly fortunate in this respect. He himself had come forward to dispute the supremacy of Henderson, and had succeeded in at least dividing public admiration, if not in eclipsing the older actor; and was now to experience the disquiet of finding his own lofty position assailed. To such a danger great histrionic success is always exposed, and there are few situations more disagreeable than that first moment almost of sharp pain when the truth comes home that a new candidate is about to dispute the throne, and has a chance of succeeding. The worst is, that familiarity begets a sort of indifference in the public, where even there is no actual falling off, and novelty is always on the side of the challenger. The present danger came from Cooke, a player of undoubted genius and much rude power and colouring in his acting; who, if he had been at all steady, or made ordinary exertion, might have been a

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theatrical affairs, boasted of his and Kemble's exertions in producing this piece, and coolly imputed its failure to the bad taste of the public.



dangerous opponent. Kemble, however, showed no alarm, perhaps sagaciously divining the character of the new comer. His sister would have exhibited more trepidation, for, with much confidence in her own unapproachable powers, she was morbidly sensitive to the prospect of rivalry. With some bitterness she told Mr. Rogers that the public always "liked mortifying their old favourites by setting up new ones;" that she could count up no less than three different attempts which had been made to set up pretenders. The first, she said, was Miss Brunton, afterwards Lady Craven; the second Miss Smith, later to be Mrs. Bartley; while the last and most dangerous was Miss O'Neil. That wish to mortify a favourite is one of the mean humours not unknown even in private friendships, and the observation showed acuteness in the actress. The calm self-restraint of John Kemble never would allow friends or enemies to force him into rivalry with Cooke, and he was heard to praise Cooke's *comedy* with an artful warmth that would have done honour to a Chesterfield. He could even take office at the same theatre, keep himself in reserve, and allow Cooke's own extravagances and jealousies to work for him. Cooke had fair play, was allowed to make experiments in some of Kemble's characters, but the public

almost at once decided which suited each. No more miserable chronicle can be conceived than the life and journal furnished to the public by his friend Dunlap; and the pendant for it is to be found in the career of the lovely but abandoned Mrs. Baddeley, as related by *her* female friend and confidante.

In this decaying condition the theatre apparently flourished. New plays were brought out, notably the *Winter's Tale*, when Mrs. Siddons's Hermione produced a wonderful impression, long after making one of those impersonations which were to be associated specially with her. To have seen Mrs. Siddons in the statue scene was one of the points that was oftenest recalled by playgoers. The play was brought forward at great expense, and the actress contributed her best exertions, with that stern and earnest conscientiousness which was so characteristic of her, and which is evident in a letter which she wrote to a friend. Her performance in the statue scene was associated with what had nearly proved a fatal accident:—

“ \* \* \* Except for a day or two, the weather has been very favourable to me hitherto. I trust it may continue so, for the *Winter's Tale* promises to be very attractive; and, whilst it continues so, I am bound in honour and conscience to put my shoulder to the

wheel, for it has been attended with great expense to the managers, and, if I can keep warm, I trust I shall continue tolerably well. As to my plans, they are, as usual, all uncertain; and I am precisely in the situation of poor Lady Percy, to whom Hotspur comically says, ‘I trust thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.’

“This must continue to be the case, in a great measure, whilst I continue to be the servant of the public, for whom (and let it not be thought vain) I can never sufficiently exert myself. I really think they receive me every night with greater and greater testimonies of approbation. I know it will give you pleasure to hear this, my dear friend, and you will not suspect me of deceiving myself in this particular.

“The other night had very nearly terminated *all my exertions*, for whilst I was standing for the statue in the *Winter's Tale*, my drapery flew over the lamps that were placed behind the pedestal; it caught fire, and had it not been for one of the scene-men, who most humanely crept on his knees and extinguished it, without my knowing anything of the matter, I might have been burnt to death, or, at all events, I should have been frightened out of my senses. Sur-

rounded as I was with muslin, the flame would have run like wildfire. The bottom of the train was entirely burned. But for the man's promptitude, it would seem as if my fate would have been inevitable. I have well rewarded the good man, and I regard my deliverance as a most gracious interposition of Providence. There is a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow. Here I am, safe and well. God be praised! and may His goodness make me profit as I ought by the time that is vouchsafed me."

She did not content herself with thus simply rewarding her preserver, but a curious chance gave her, almost immediately, the opportunity of saving the man's son, who had deserted from his regiment, from disgrace and degradation. She "wrote herself blind" with applications to persons of influence. She almost wore herself out hurrying about, interceding, and at last, as Mr. Campbell believes, succeeded in what she had laboured for so heartily.

Her son Henry Sidōons had now caught the family ardour for the stage, and, in defiance of all advice, of his mother's warning, and his own manifest shortcomings, persisted in his resolution. He lived to repent it heartily, and lived also, at a dinner table, to send a challenge to his uncle, who had tried to dis-

suade him from the same course.\* His mother was pleased with his performance, and pronounced it a very respectable first success. More impartial judges, however, found it very mediocre, without any of that raw ability which promises so well for the future. He never made any figure, and soon took up the simpler rôle of managing a theatre. Thus yet one more of the Kemble family had found his way to the stage.

On this occasion, however, every one showed the greatest interest, and the hopes of the mother were encouraged by the most friendly reports. She wrote to her old friend Mrs. Inchbald one of those natural and almost girlish letters which had a share in drawing friends to her. "I received your kind letter," she wrote, from Bannisters, "and thank you very much for the interest you have taken in my dear Harry's success. It gives me great pleasure to find that Mr. Harris appreciates his talents, which I think highly of, and which I believe will grow to great perfection by fostering, on the one hand, and care and industry on the other. I have little doubt of Mr. Harris's liberality, and none of the laudable ambition

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\* The scene is described in the "Annual Biography," in the memoir before alluded to. It shows Kemble's admirable temper under such a ridiculous trial.

of my son to obtain it. It is so long since I have felt anything like joy, that it appears like a dream to me, and I believe I shall not be able quite to convince myself that this is real till I am present 'to attend the triumph and partake the gale.' I am all anxiety and impatience to hear the effect of Hamlet; it is a tremendous undertaking for so young a creature, and where so perfect a model has been so long contemplated. I was frightened when I yesterday received information of it. Oh, I hope to God he will get well through it. Adieu, dear Muse." Less partial witnesses pronounced the performance a failure.

By the summer of 1801 the weary country tour was again before her: for the delays, and probable losses at Drury Lane, made the undergoing of this fatigue absolutely necessary, and after her nearly twenty years' service, she had not enough put by to allow of her taking rest. There was everything indeed to make her anxious and desponding—her ailing daughter—her own health giving way, as shown by lassitude, and dangerous and painful symptoms of the erysipelas which was ultimately to prove fatal. Her husband was ill at Bath, whither she had to set out and visit him. Yet the intrepid woman set herself resolutely to work to try and fulfil all the

duties cast upon her. In what spirit she attempted these many tasks may be gathered from her letters.

“I hope and trust,” she wrote of her husband, “that I shall find him better than he himself thinks : *for I know, by sad experience, with what difficulty a mind, weakened by long and uninterrupted suffering, admits hope, much less assurance.* I shall be here till next Saturday, and after that time at Lancaster, till Tuesday the 28th ; thence I shall go immediately to Bath, where I shall have about a month’s quiet, and then begin to play at Bristol for a few nights. ‘*Such resting finds the sole of unblest feet !*’ When we shall come to London is uncertain, for nothing is settled by Mr. Sheridan, and I think it not impossible that *my* winter may be spent in Dublin ; for I must go on *making*, to secure the few comforts that I have been able to attain for myself and my family. It is providential for us all that I can do so much. But I hope it is not wrong to say, that I am tired, and should be glad to be at rest indeed. I hope yet to see the day when I can be quiet. My mouth is not yet well, though somewhat less exquisitely painful. I have become a frightful object with it for some time, and I believe this complaint has robbed me of those poor remains of beauty once ad-



mired, at least which, in your partial eyes, I once possessed. . . .”

After one more season at Drury Lane she could endure the systematic denial of justice no longer. Yet in spite of everything she had played with even more than her usual diligence, and was welcomed with even greater partiality by the audience. “Oh, how you would have enjoyed,” she wrote, “my *rentrée* in Constance; I was received really as if it had been my first appearance in the season.”

Sheridan was foolish enough to make no exertion to satisfy the two players. Wearied with his neglect of their claims, at the end of the season that closed in 1802, both formally withdrew from his house. Two Kembles indeed remained—Charles and Stephen—but they could only be counted among the ordinary stock actors of the house. From that time, as it was to be expected, a steady decay settled on the theatre, which must have led to universal confusion, and to the ruin of all concerned. Nothing short of a grand conflagration could bring matters to a simple issue.



## CHAPTER III.

## A FRESH TRIAL.

MRS. SIDDONS had long been planning a visit to Dublin, but the length of the journey and the barrier of the sea made the expedition seem of tremendous length and difficulty. A winter would have to be spent among a people she despised, yet whose hearty applause and pecuniary support would be more satisfactory than painful wandering among the English country towns. But it was not without grave misgivings that she could bring herself to set out. She was overwhelmed with a presentiment of some impending misfortune, scarcely to be wondered at when we think that in those times Ireland was almost as remote from London as New York is to-day; and that during the winter she was to be absent, it was only too probable that some loved face would disappear. Her leave-taking was really pathetic. To Mr. Campbell she seemed to hint that she never hoped to see England again. When she

took leave of her friend Mrs. Greathead, she became unnerved and hysterical, and seemed to think that when they met again, if ever they did meet, some great misfortune would have overtaken her. All this presentiment was connected with her charming daughter Sarah. One had already been snatched away, and she was nervously anxious as to how long the other was to be left to her. There seemed no reasonable ground for present forebodings, as the young girl was full of spirits, and going out to parties.

Her mother left town in May, 1802, with Tate Wilkinson's daughter as travelling companion. On the eve of her departure, and in all the agonies of leave-taking, she wrote to Mrs. Piozzi a letter full of profound grief: "Farewell, my beloved friend! a long, long farewell! Oh, such a day as this has been! to leave all that is dear to me. I have been surrounded by my family, and my eyes have dwelt with a foreboding tenderness, too painful, on the venerable face of my dear father, that tells me I shall look on it no more. I commit my children to your friendly protection, with a full and perfect reliance on the goodness you have always manifested towards your ever faithful and affectionate S. SIDDONS."

Mr. Sedors and Miss Wilkinson  
present their compliments to  
Mr. & Mrs. Hamilton and  
will with great pleasure do them-  
selves the honor of waiting upon  
you on Tuesday Evening the 25<sup>th</sup>  
of January

My dear Mother,

I thanked you before you know  
for the gift you were so good as to  
send me; or, if I did not, I intended  
it - Intention constitutes the Deed in  
Sin - Murder, Adultery, Fornication -  
and why not in good Deeds, if in bad  
ones? - I don't see why the Devil should  
have two Chances to another Man's soul -  
well, I intend to dine with you, and  
the phans somewhere on Friday to  
talk over our Preparations for next  
Campaign. - Yrs. - J. McNeill:

June 6. 1879 22



She had a pleasant journey down to Holyhead, passing by Stratford, where she stopped to see the Shakspearean relics. She then passed on to Wales,\* and from Wales to Dublin, where she was received with delight. Her profits, she wrote, had gone beyond all her highest expectations. She then visited Cork and Belfast, at the latter of which towns she remained nearly a month, working the Northerners of Ireland up to enthusiasm. She then went on a visit to the Gosford family, and returned to Dublin. There, after this brilliant tour, she found her troubles waiting her—letters from her husband requiring money to pay for the new house in Marlborough Street, and to fit out their son George, who was about to be sent to India. She had therefore to lay herself out for work, and made a fresh engagement with Mr. Jones, the Dublin manager. This gentleman seemed almost as impracticable as her former director.

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\* "We left Conway," says Miss Wilkinson in her diary, "next morning; and ere long crossed Penman Mawr, where, like other travellers, we alighted from our carriages to look from a bridge that commands the fullest view of the sublime landscape, with all its rocks and water. A lady within hearing of us, was in such ecstasies that she exclaimed, 'This awful scenery makes me feel as if I were only a worm, or a grain of dust, on the face of the earth.' Mrs. Siddons turned round and said, 'I feel very differently.'"

He was a man of good family and connexions, lived hospitably at Clonliffe, a handsome place outside Dublin, and was the person to whom Mr. Croker addressed his lively "Familiar Epistles," descriptive of the Irish actors.\* There must have been something antipathetic, as it is called, in the actress's temper, as regards all persons of the country with whom she had to deal : for with this manager too she presently became involved in quarrels and disputes of precisely the same character as those she had with Daly. The actress's cold and business-like impassiveness must have acted as a perpetual irritant. The old charges were presently revived—of stinginess and of refusing to play for the public charities. It would seem that the manager had proposed, and that she had consented, that one of the Dublin charities should be selected ; and that the choice should be left to the wife of the Lord Lieutenant. It was believed that the Rotunda or Lying-in Hospital, then a popular charity, and the assiduous patronage of which by the Dublin ladies often caused amusement, would be selected. This arrangement was made in the summer:

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\* Most of the Dublin managers, down to the late Mr. Cole, have been gentlemen by birth and breeding.

but she had been a year and a half in this country without this tribute being given. It certainly *was* unfortunate that she was always to be involved in some embarrassment of the kind; and it must be said, as in the former case, that the public had grounds for forming its usual rough judgment in the matter. She wrote a letter to Jones reminding him of the arrangement—"why so amiable a purpose was not immediately promoted, I cannot even guess; but I am sure that its postponement cannot be attributed to any backwardness on my part. The same motives which actuated me *then* are no less powerful now; and it will give me infinite pleasure if by the exertion of every power I possess, I can be able to promote an important object of utility. And now," she went on, "if I may be permitted to speak of myself as a private individual, I have only to regret the sad necessity imposed upon me of vindicating my character from the imputation of a failing as unamiable as, I trust, it is foreign to my nature. I regret that I should be constrained from unfortunate circumstances to endeavour to rescue myself from an obloquy which I hope I have never incurred by my conduct. I regret that the country in which I am obliged to do so, should be Ireland." This seemed a

fair appeal; but still, as in the former instance, it might be urged that where she felt it to be her duty to confer this favour, something more was necessary than a mere passive acquiescence, and it was certainly not the manager's interest to show himself eager for what was to entail on him the loss of a night's profit. The matter was publicly discussed, and at last the trustees of the institution had to come forward with an explanation, which was in nearly as awkward a shape as Brereton's had been long before. "Mrs. Siddons had certainly *never refused* to act for them: *she had indeed never been requested to do so.*" But almost immediately came the news of which she had such sad forebodings. Roger Kemble, the old strolling manager, had closed his motley career. She was overwhelmed with this blow. Yet she could think at such a moment of the distresses of others. "I have less time," she wrote to Dr. Whalley, "than inclination for writing very often; which is so much my case at this moment that I trust your goodness will excuse any apparent abruptness in these few hurried lines. I thank you for your kind condolence. My dear father died the death of the righteous; may my last end be like his, without a groan!



“With respect to my dear Mrs. Pennington, my heart is too much alive to her unhappy situation, and my affection for her too lively, to have induced the necessity of opening a wound which is of itself too apt to bleed. Indeed, indeed, my dear sir, there was no occasion to recal those sad and tender scenes to soften my nature ; but let it pass.

“You need not be informed, I imagine, that such a sum as 80*l.* is too considerable to be immediately produced out of a woman’s quarterly allowance ; but, as I have not the least doubt of Mr. Siddons being ready and willing to offer this testimony of regard and gratitude, I beg you will arrange the business with him immediately. I will write to him this day, if I can find a moment’s time.

“If you can devise any quicker mode of accomplishing your amiable purpose, rely upon my paying the 80*l.* within the next six months. For God’s sake, do not let it slip through. If I knew how to send the money from hence, I would do it this instant ; but I think, considering the delay of distance and the caprice of wind and sea, it will be more expeditiously done by Mr. Siddons. God bless and restore you to perfect health and tranquillity !”

The alternative that she herself should become

responsible for the money, must have been the one adopted, as Mr. Siddons had himself been writing to *her* to send him supplies. These matters interfered with the promised benefit; but it no doubt was at last carried out successfully. Whatever be the merits of the question, there must have been some want of prudence in her arrangements; or else she was the most unfortunate of great actresses to have this unworthy accusation revived so many times, and in so many places. On this occasion Jones seems to have done all he could to set her right with the public, though presently her relations with him were to become more disagreeable than ever; and he generally terminated their dispute by sending for his solicitor.

It was wonderful indeed how she found spirit to carry her through. At home, the family for whom she was labouring was a perpetual source of anxiety. Her husband, enfeebled as he was by gout and other infirmities, was dabbling in speculations, and through an absurd sensitiveness at the greater consideration paid to his wife, and which overshadowed *his* importance, chose to assert his independence by embarrassing their affairs.

Her son George was now departing for India, furnished with the highest recommendations, even

from the Royal Family. He came over to take farewell of his mother, remaining with her a fortnight. This loss was in itself almost equal to the death of another child. Now came letters of her daughter, who was enjoying the gaieties of town with a relish that in one so delicate might excite the gravest forebodings. Her son Henry had during her absence married a Miss Murray. It was certainly hard that the fondest of mothers should be absent from all these scenes of domestic interest as well as of trial; for in both instances she would have brought sympathy and comfort by her presence.

“Miss Murray,” wrote the young girl to her friend, Patty Wilkinson, “looked very beautiful in a white chip hat, with a lace cap under it, her long dark pelisse tied together with purple bows, ready for travelling. Harry was so nervous that Miss Payne was nursing him up with good things. At nine, my father, Mr. Murray, &c. &c., and I, went to church. The ceremony had hardly begun before poor Henry turned as pale as death, and shook from head to foot so that he was obliged to hold by the rails near him to support himself. Miss Murray trembled, and, before she could finish what she had to say after the clergyman, her tears prevented her speaking out;

she replied the rest in a whisper. I was extremely affected, and, turning to look at the rest, I found that my moist handkerchief was not without companions. Harry was very ready to reply, and cried out 'I will' before it was necessary. He wanted to put on the ring, too, before the proper time. After they were married, we signed our names, as witnesses, under them. Then we all saluted Mrs. Henry Siddons, and, as soon as we returned to their lodgings, they set off for Birmingham. My father made the bride a present of a handsome coral necklace, bracelet, and earrings. I meant to have given her a ring, but that provoking Hamlet did not send it home in time."

An acquaintance that she made here was afterwards to bring her great annoyance and discredit. She found at the theatre a fencing-master and his wife named Galindo, and seems to have contracted an extraordinary intimacy with both. She was a little impulsive, and rather indiscriminate in her friendships; but with her extraordinary roll of titled friends, it is infinitely to her credit that she did not follow the example of others of her profession, and grow "fine." To these Galindos she took an extraordinary fancy, which she pursued, according to Mrs. Galindo's account, with much indiscretion.

She used their carriage, but after a time insisted on driving out alone with Mr. Galindo. "I requested you," said Mrs. Galindo, "to use my curricie as your own, and you certainly complied with my request, for from that time I was entirely excluded from it." Mrs. Siddons then proposed to act Hamlet, solely for the purpose of learning fencing from Galindo; and insisted on taking her lessons privately. The Galindos went with her to Cork, Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Galindo travelling in the curricie, Mrs. Galindo and Miss Wilkinson following in a post-chaise. There the actress read Hamlet for Mr. Galindo's benefit, but the proceeds were all spent in attending Mrs. Siddons to the Lakes of Killarney. Other charges followed. Mr. Galindo would be asked to the actress's house, and detained till three in the morning perhaps, and his wife bidden not to come. Matters grew worse and worse; an engagement at Covent Garden was promised to Mrs. Galindo; but when Kemble came over, he was impressed very unfavourably by her, and declined to carry out the arrangement. Mrs. Siddons ultimately advanced Galindo a thousand pounds to enable him to buy a share in a provincial theatre. The jealousy of his wife and the default of payment brought about a quarrel between these intimate

friends ; and some seven or eight years later, the woman published a half-frantic pamphlet, for which she found a respectable publisher, in which she, and in the plainest terms, and with her own name on the title page, charged Mrs. Siddons with intriguing with her husband, Galindo. It would be impossible to pass this matter over in a life of Mrs. Siddons, though Boaden and Campbell have done so, because it was matter of public notoriety at the time, and the scandal of the hour. But the extraordinary phenomenon remains that this outrageous charge, made in the grossest and most deliberate fashion, should have been tolerated in a decent metropolis, and this against a woman of her position and character ; and further, that no steps, so far as can now be discovered, were taken to punish the author of the outrage. It is evident that the whole was the morbid imagining of a woman furious with jealousy and a sense of injury from the engagement not being carried out. Any one can follow the curious distortion this colouring gave to her statement. It is insulting to the great actress to think of weighing seriously the calumnies of this libeller, but a few of her more innocent facts may be tested by independent evidence. One of her charges was that Mrs. Siddons went to Cork knowing

the desperate situation of her child, and that Mr. Galindo and Miss Wilkinson had concealed a letter telling her this, until a performance at the Rotundo was over: that she persisted in going to Cork; and that on this proceeding the Dublin newspapers made many severe remarks. Now, the truth was, she had received such a letter; but a letter from her husband changed her plans. Her enemies were indeed legion. Not very long before another libel appeared against her anonymously; and her husband offered a thousand pounds—of her own money—for the discovery of the author. The readiness of the Irish papers to comment on her want of feeling, shows that she lacked friends in that country. She was indiscreet; was too impulsive in choosing her friends, and too honest to conceal her dislikes. Her letters to these adventurers are just as warm and affectionate as any she ever wrote to her dear friend Dr. Whalley or to Mrs. Fitz-Hugh. They are almost romantic. Yet at this time she was a mature matron close upon fifty. When the matter came before the public in 1809, it is astonishing with what calmness she dismissed it. Here is certainly all the calmness of innocence.

“Among all the kind attentions I have received,”



she wrote to the Whalleys, "none has comforted me more, my dear friend, than your invaluable letter. I thank God all my friends are exactly of your opinion with respect to the manner of treating this diabolical business. To a delicate mind publicity is in itself painful, and I trust that a life of tolerable rectitude will justify my conduct to my friends. I have been dreadfully shaken, but I trust that the natural disposition to be well, will shortly restore me. My dear Cecilia is indeed all a fond mother can wish."

But her brother Kemble was not inclined to be indulgent in the matter, and was indignant with her for this weak facility in receiving the advances of mere strangers. A letter of the "dear Muse" shows how angry he was:—"When Kemble returned from Spain, in 1803, he came to me like a madman; said Mrs. Siddons had been imposed upon by persons whom it was a disgrace to her to *know*, and he begged me to explain it so to her. He requested Harris to withdraw his promise of his engaging Mrs. G., at Mrs. Siddons's request. Yet such was his tenderness to his sister's sensibility, that he would not undeceive her himself. Mr. Kemble blamed me, and I blamed him for his reserve, and we have never been so cordial since, nor have I ever admired Mrs. Siddons so much



since; for though I can pity a dupe, I must also despise one. Even to be familiar with such people was a lack of virtue, though not of chastity.”\* This shows how indiscreet had been her friendship for these adventurers. At the same time this letter quite clears her from one of Mrs. Galindo’s frantic accusations—namely, of having interfered with her engagement at Covent Garden, which, we see, was Kemble’s work. This imbroglio helps us to understand the fits of unpopularity that pursued her on other occasions; for her loyalty to those whom she fancied were her friends would not allow her readily to receive proof of their unworthiness. And we may fairly believe that on many other occasions, when this generous woman was pursued with ill-natured reports and reproaches, she was only suffering the penalty for her own inconsiderate good nature. An old friend of hers, Mr. J. Taylor, in his “Recollections,” mentions a fact which shows how much persecution and falsity in this direction she had to bear. He found her burning some old letters and papers, and she showed him some verses against her character which a friend had cut out from the *St. James’s Chronicle*, and sent

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\* Boaden’s “Life of Inchbald.”

to her, with a proposal to answer it. They both agreed, knowing the character of the writer, that this had been done on Stukely's principle in the play, and that the writer of the attack and of the defence was the same person.

Her vivacious daughter was now exhibiting one of the most fatal symptoms of consumption in a new flush of spirits and a hearty enjoyment for parties of pleasure, which she chronicled in agreeable letters to her mother. An ardent admirer of hers was Charles Moore, brother to Sir John, who gave her friends pic-nics at his chambers in the Temple, which she described to her mother. In the March of 1803 when the latter had made her engagement to go to Cork, on the eve of starting she was alarmed by a letter from her husband, containing the worst accounts of her daughter's health. She would have instantly embarked for England, but heavy gales were blowing and no packet could put out. A day or two later arrived a letter from him, telling her not to be anxious about her daughter, begging her to start for Cork and complete her engagement. Indeed this gentleman, it is quite evident, behaved with more regard for the interest of his family than for the feelings of the mother; for the first letter he wrote

was to Miss Wilkinson, in which he charged her not to mention the news to his wife. But the situation of the fond mother was now to become almost as tragic as any scene in one of her most impassioned dramas; and she could never have forgiven him the weary days and nights of agonized suspense which succeeded that interested act of concealment. When we think of the slow posts, the slower packets dependent on the weather, and the unfortunate journey to the south which hindered her receiving letters, we can scarcely conceive a more piteous situation. What her state of mind was may be gathered from the following letter :—

“How shall I sufficiently thank you,” she wrote to Mrs. Fitz-Hugh, “for all your kindness to me? You know my heart, and I may spare my words; for, God knows, my mind is in so distracted a state, that I can hardly write or speak rationally. Oh! why did not Mr. Siddons tell me when she was first taken so ill? I should then have got clear of this engagement, and what a world of wretchedness and anxiety would have been spared to me! And yet, good God! how should I have crossed the sea? For a fortnight past it has been so dangerous that nothing but wherries have ventured to the Holy Head; but yet

I think I should have put myself into one of them, if I could have known that my poor dear girl was so ill. Oh! tell me all about her. I am almost broken-hearted, though the last accounts tell me that she has been mending for several days. Has she wished for me? but I know, I feel, that she has. The dear creature used to think it weakness in me, when I told her of the possibility of what might be endured from illness, when that tremendous element divides one from one's family. Would to God I were at her bedside! It would be for me then to suffer with resignation what I cannot now support with any fortitude. If anything could relieve the misery I feel, it would be that my dear and inestimable Sir Lucas Pepys had her under his care. Pray tell him this, and ask him to write me a word of comfort. Will you believe that I must play to-night, and can you imagine any wretchedness like it in this terrible state of mind? For a moment I comfort myself by reflecting on the strength of the dear creature's constitution, which has so often rallied, to the astonishment of us all, under similar serious attacks. Then again, when I think of the frail tenure of human existence, my heart fails and sinks into dejection. God bless you! The suspense that distance keeps

me in you may imagine, but it cannot be described."

In this desperate state of suspense she had to remain many days. The storm was raging also at Cork, and no letters came in. After a week's interval a letter reached her, which informed her that though there was not much improvement, still there was hope. It does seem as though the intention was to prevent her losing her engagement. But she could not endure the torture any longer. She went to the manager, Pero, who, with the greatest humanity and generosity, and also at great personal loss, released her. She hurried to Dublin, but again found that no packet could sail. There were no letters waiting her, for they had all been directed to Cork. In such a distracted state, the fevered reproaches she addressed to one of her best friends were excusable.

"I am perfectly astonished," she wrote on April 2, "my dear friend, that I have not heard from you, after begging it so earnestly. Good God! what can be the reason that intelligence must be extorted, as it were, in circumstances like mine. One would think common benevolence, setting affection quite aside, might have induced some of you to alleviate, as much as possible, such distress as you know I must feel.

The last letter from Mr. Siddons stated that she was better. Another letter, from Mr. Montgomery, at Oxford, says that George gave him the same account. Why, why, am I to hear this only from a person at that distance from her, and so ill-informed as the writer must be of the state of her health? Why should not you or Mr. Siddons have told me this? I cannot account for your silence at all, for you know how to feel. I hope to sail to-night, and to reach London the third day: God knows when that will be. O God! what a home to return to, after all I have been doing! and what a prospect to the end of my days! Yours ever, S. S."

At last she was able to embark; then posted to Shrewsbury, where she found a letter from her husband, telling her there was no hope, but at the same time imploring her not to endanger her health by too rapid travelling. As she was actually reading it the last scene in this tragic episode was to be played. For her friend was called out of the room to speak to a stranger who had just arrived from town; and when she returned the mother read in that scared face the fatal news. She sank at once into a state of cold torpor, in which she lay until the next day. It can well be imagined that this was the most painful

episode of her whole life ; and those terrible flittings between Cork and Dublin, her playing to excited audiences, while her heart was far away with her dying child ; the anxious hoping against hope, the waiting for news, with that dismal scene at Shrewsbury, must have made it seem like some ghastly dream. It was scarcely wonderful after this that the public should have heard stories of "domestic differences" between her and her husband ; his eagerness to turn her talents to profit had deprived her of a consolation, which to a fond mother was precious beyond all things. The truth was there was never much sympathy between them ; and this want threw her back, as it were, on herself, and gave her much of this independence of character. After this blow her health was quite shattered, and she had to go to Cheltenham, where she tried to recruit her strength a little, but could not shut out the image of her lost child.

"I am unable, at times," she wrote, "to reconcile myself to my fate. The darling being for whom I mourn is assuredly released from a life of suffering, and numbered among the blessed spirits made perfect. But to be separated for ever, in spite of reason, and in spite of religion, is at times too much for me.



Give my love to dear Charles Moore, if you chance to see him. Have you read his beautiful account of my sweet Sally? It is done with a truth and modesty which has given me the sincerest of all pleasures that I am now allowed to feel, and assures me still more than ever that he who could feel and taste such excellence was worthy of the particular regard she had for him.—S. S.”

At this place she was consoled by the company of her family, and with her little daughter Cecilia, her brother John, and the young man alluded to in the letter, Charles Moore, she made a short tour along the River Wye. This affectionate sympathy helped to cheer her a little, and her health began to mend. She had soon to think of her important engagement at Covent Garden; for a decent period of mourning is not among the privileges of the player.



## CHAPTER IV.

## KEMBLE ABROAD.

KEMBLE might now fairly congratulate himself on the far more satisfactory position he was to hold under a new direction. Mr. Harris, of Covent Garden Theatre, was the direct opposite of Sheridan, being a manager of wonderful tact or success—punctual in his payments and honourable in his dealings. The negotiation was carried on through an old friend, Mrs. Inchbald. The whole concern was valued at 138,000*l.*, of which Harris represented one-half, the rest being divided among four proprietors, of which Lewis, the actor, was one. The latter growing nervous as to the precarious character of such investments, was willing to dispose of his sixth share, and Kemble purchased it for the sum of 23,000*l.* He could not, in all probability, command half that amount. But he found a friend and admirer in a Mr. Heathcote, who liberally furnished him with a large sum. In those days of patent theatres, it was wise policy

for a great actor to hold a share in the house, in addition to his salary ; for he thus enjoyed a portion of the profits his own talents were bringing to the theatre. Kemble was also to be stage-manager—so he must have received nearly 2500*l.* a year from Covent Garden house. How substantial was the security of a well-conducted house may be conceived from the fact of a single comedy (*John Bull*) bringing in 30,000*l.* to the treasury. Further, he was able to muster a strong Kemble party under his direction—one that included his sister Mrs. Siddons, Charles Kemble, and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Siddons. This seemed a little too much of a family arrangement, and naturally aroused some jealousy and more ridicule.

As soon as this important arrangement was concluded, he determined to go abroad—perhaps in imitation of Garrick—and thus make his absence felt. He also proposed studying the French and Spanish stage. His friend Heathcote was his travelling companion, and it is interesting to find that he went out of his way to visit his old college at Douai. But he found the house broken up, the English all gone. He had not the heart to go up to his old room. At Paris he put up at the Hôtel de Courland, in the Place de la Concorde. He described Paris as “a

scene of magnificence, filth, pleasure, poverty, gaiety, distress, virtue, and vice." The English of distinction in Paris overwhelmed him with attention. Lords Egremont and Holland, "who lived most splendidly," insisted on his dining with them nearly every day. Talma was anxious to see *Pizarro*, to try if it could be fitted to the French stage. On his return Kemble frankly confessed that he was not struck by the "grand style" of the French stage. But like every one who has seen real French playing, he was impressed by the amazing finish and nature of the French comedians. He noted also the means by which this was brought about, and described to his friend Sir Walter Scott with admiration the humble subordination of every one to the interest of the piece. In England, he said, every one must be a Bashaw or Pasha, as though they were in Eastern countries; and he told how his attention had been attracted, behind the scenes at one of the French theatres, by an actor who was earnestly practising a single speech in every inflection, and was told that this was an inferior actor of the class we call "super-numerary." Such lessons are valuable even to the greatest actors.

It is curious, however, to contrast his general re-

ception in Paris with that of Garrick and of a man like Sterne. It proves what has been often stated, that in French society—and there was then some remnant of the old French society—it was impossible for a foreigner to make his way, except by natural talent. Kemble was received cordially, but his dignity and silence were not likely to recommend him. However, they all praised his stately bearing; and it was discovered (as a compliment) that he had a strong likeness to Bonaparte. One of the Consul's hats was even gravely brought to him to try on, to see if the size of the heads corresponded.

A more interesting feature of this visit was his intimacy with Talma, who loaded him with attention, and became his official cicerone. The French comedians welcomed him, complimented him with a dinner, and later with a handsome supper. The newspapers chronicled these rather slender honours with great complacency.

“Mr. Kemble,” said one of the journals, “the celebrated actor of London, whose arrival at Paris has been announced by the papers, possesses a fine figure, and appears to be about forty years of age. His hair is dark, his features strongly marked, and he has a physiognomy truly tragic. He understands and speaks

with accuracy the French language. In company he appears thoughtful and reserved. His manners, however, are very distinguished, and he has in his looks, when addressed, an expression of courtesy that affords the best idea of his education. Mr. Kemble is well informed, and has the reputation of being a good grammarian, which must distinguish him from other English actors, who are more attentive to attitude than to diction. Talma, to whom he has letters of recommendation, does the honours of Paris; they visit together our finest works, and appear to be already united by the most friendly ties. The Comédie Française has received him with all the respect due to the Le Kain of England. Kemble is frank enough to avow that our mode of theatrical declamation does not suit him, and that he thinks it too remote from nature; but he confesses that some of our actors have great talents. Before his departure, they talk of playing *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo*. This truly French gallantry will have the double advantage of doing honour to a whole people in the person of their most celebrated tragedian, and of drawing great houses."

The quiet conceit of all this is highly characteristic, and the contrast of this lame reception, joined to so

much pretence, with the cordial and brilliant fashion in which Garrick had been welcomed some fifty years before, shows what a change had come over the French character. There was, of course, a prodigious difference between the two men; and the gay, vivacious Garrick—himself half a Frenchman—must have recommended himself in French society, where the grave, ceremonious Kemble, with all his distinguished manner, would have been found only a bore. But the change in French manners, the first symptoms of which had been noticed by Sterne, had taken place all the same. Talma was not a very thorough admirer, and long after, to Miss Wynne, the agreeable “Lady of quality,” found fault with Kemble’s acting after the murder scene in *Macbeth*. But this is only coming back to the old fault of Kemble, and of so many great English actors, who, while expressing passion and emotion in the grandest way, do so under too much submission to certain stage conventionalities—just as the old-fashioned forms of some of Haydn’s and Mozart’s music wrap up the grandest thoughts.

He passed on from Paris to Madrid, but was not much pleased with the place. He there set himself vigorously to learn Spanish. But his style was pedantic,

and contrasts very unfavourably with that of his sister, which is so free, natural, and graphic.\*

When the news of his father's death was written to him, this pedantry disappeared, and the quiet dignity of sincere grief was evident.

"My dearest friend," he wrote to his brother, from Madrid, on December 31st, 1802, "how sincerely I always loved my father and respected his sound understanding, you know too well for it to be necessary that I should even mention what I feel this moment, on opening your letter. God Almighty receive him into his everlasting happiness! and teach me to be resigned and resolute, to deserve to follow him when my appointed hour is come. My poor mother, though I know she will exert becoming firmness of mind in this and every passage of her life, cannot but feel a melancholy void in losing the companion of her youth, the associate of her advancing years, and the father of her children. I regret from the very bottom of my heart that I

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\* Here is a specimen. "There are here two Theatres. Señor Mayques, who manages that called *Los Canos del Peral*, has been in France; he is an intelligent actor, and certainly the best in the company. In this theatre they principally act translations of French comedies and vaudevilles."



cannot, with the most dutiful affection, assure her at her feet, that what a grateful son can offer and do shall never be wanting from me, to promote her content and ease and happiness. How in vain have I delighted myself in thousands of inconvenient occurrences on this journey, with the thought of contemplating my father's cautious incredulity while I related them to him! Millions of things, uninteresting maybe to anybody else, I had treasured up for his surprise and scrutiny! It is God's pleasure that he is gone from us. Once more, the peace of the just be with him! The resignation I had long observed in him to the will of Heaven, and his habitual piety, are no small consolation to me; yet I cannot help feeling a dejected swelling at my heart that keeps me in a flood of tears for him, in spite of all I can do to stop them. Again, God bless him! This is Friday; there is no post to the North till Tuesday morning. In a few hours I don't doubt my being better able to write."

"January 1st.

"This day ought to begin with congratulations and good wishes to my mother and you, and I beg you both to accept them from me. You see Michael Sharpe sometimes, I suppose? Pray desire him to take care of my father's picture for me—it is like him,



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though not quite what I could wish—at least, I used to think so. It is precious now, however. Perhaps my mother would choose to have it; if she would, let it be framed for me as it ought to be, and hung up in her drawing-room. The letters I write my wife I consider as letters to you all; you hear from time to time, as she receives them, what I do, what I see, and that I am well. I can't imagine a more amiable friend and companion to anybody under affliction than my wife. She is affectionate at once, and cheerful, and I know how particularly she would stifle her own feelings, and exert herself to be a consolation to my mother. You must have had much to undergo, Charles; much of grief, and much of trouble. I wish I had been at home to partake them with you, and be some use to you. Nothing in my opinion could be better judged than your interring my poor father without the least affectation of any parade, and I agree with you entirely, that his remains should be protected by a simple stone; but I beg that in the plain memorial inscribed on it his age may be mentioned. Long life implies virtuous habits, and they are real honours. I thank you for the news you send me, though you don't find me at this moment in a disposition to think much about the theatre. As far as regards your own particular share in

it, you have nothing now to do but to act your best, let your part be what it will, for your own progress in your art; to do whatever is within your power for your employers out of common honesty. I need not ask you to find the strongest and the tenderest terms to offer my duty to my mother in. Sid, Sally, Cicely, Harry, all have my love. I write to my wife by this post. I have only received a letter from Charles Moore (of November 21st) by the mail that brought me your sad account of December 14th. I will write to him very soon, tell him. Adieu, my dear Charles.

“Ever your affectionate brother,

“J. P. KEMBLE.”

The arrangement for embarking in the Covent Garden enterprise had not been quite concluded before his departure; but he seems to have left the matter in the hands of his “dear Muse,” Mrs. Inchbald, who was to watch over his interests in his absence. Considering that the matter was of so much importance to him, this careless postponement of business to pleasure appears a little strange; but it must be said, he never showed that concern about worldly interests which it was the fashion—and so unjustly—to lay to the charge of his sister. He was later to dispose of his share in the concern with almost the same in-

difference with which he had taken it up. Mrs. Kemble, who was left behind, was allowed by his friends to feel his absence as little as possible, and she was overwhelmed with attention of the most liberal kind. The noble owners of Stanmore Priory—the Marquis and Marchioness of Abercorn, a family with whom a princely hospitality seems hereditary—were giving magnificent entertainments, to which the highest in the land were bidden, and where the tragedian's wife was welcomed as an honoured guest, and seems to have remained for months. She is described as being an attractive and interesting person, and to her friend Mrs. Inchbald she sent accounts of the festivities, written in a very agreeable and lively fashion. The house was full to overflowing—the Neapolitan and Portuguese Ministers staying there, Lord Westmoreland, Sir Charles and Lady Asgill, Lady Cahir, the Dublin belle, and many more. “Lady Abercorn,” she writes, “sits with me an hour in the evening. Upon my honour,” adds the flattered Priscilla, “she treats me with the affectionate kindness of a sister.” Much interest too was expressed in Mr. Kemble's travels, which she had to detail at length for the company at Stanmore. “He has gone much out of his way,” she wrote to her friend Mrs. Inchbald, “to

go to Bilbao, the capital of Biscay ; he has crossed the Pyrenees twice. He says the grandeur of the country he has gone through is not to be described ; that our Welsh mountains are mole-hills compared to Mount Ossuna ; then such torrents, woods, mouldering towers, and broken arches of bridges, as made it delightful, and amply repaid him for the risks he had run in victory ; for he says he has been often in great danger.”

But an account of the entertainment is so spirited, and written in such pride and enjoyment, that it is worth while inserting it at length, as a memorial of a most agreeable woman.

“Our Friday evening was most splendid, and to me in every way triumphant. We had to dine and sleep in the house about forty persons—the Prince of Wales, Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Melbourne and family, the Castlereaghs, Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan, Lady Westmoreland and the Ladies Fane, Lady Ely, &c. The audience consisted of about seventy persons—a large party from the Earl of Essex’s, another from Prince Castelcicala, and everybody supped. Nothing could be more brilliant ; the whole theatricals under my direction ; and, I do assure you, most excellently acted. Lady Cahir admirable in *Lady Contest*, and she was a blaze of diamonds.

During dinner the Prince inquired much after Mr. Kemble, and the Marchioness, went into the most unbounded panegyrics upon him, and said he had been only twice to Drury Lane, once to the Pantomime and once to see Falstaff, and certainly should not go again until he returned. An Epilogue was spoken by the Hon. Mr. Lamb, in which was a towering compliment to Mr. Kemble, warmly received; and after it was over and supper over, the Prince came and sat down by me. He would not allow me to stand, and talked in the most familiar manner and the most friendly for an hour; all this in the presence of *my friend* Sheridan. Sheridan was very civil, and so was I; sent a long message to Mr. K., wishing him to return, which I told him I would not send. He asked for his direction, which I laughed at, but told him if he wished to write anything I would send it to him.

“I never saw anything more beautiful than the supper-rooms. Mrs. Sheridan came in a very elegant chariot—four beautiful black horses and two footmen. The Duchess had only one. Mrs. Sheridan had a fine shawl on, that he said he gave forty-five guineas for, a diamond necklace, earrings, cross, cestus, and clasps to her shoulders, and a double row of fine pearls round her neck.

“I wish you had come, as I do believe there never was a thing of the kind went off better. The billiard room was the theatre, and we had a very pretty set of scenes, a band of music, and the organ struck up ‘God save the King’ as soon as the Prince was seated. Lord and Lady Abercorn treated me with the most marked attention, and I dare say Sheridan wished me at the d——l; and all the grandees talking of Mr. Kemble’s return, and the desire they had to see him again. Sheridan is little-minded enough to be vexed at seeing any of his performers admitted into the society he lives with.

“We have a grand dinner again to-morrow, Mr. Addington and a large party to meet him. I shall be here again at Easter should I be in England. I have the pleasure of being convinced that I have not\* by my long residence lost any part of the good opinion the whole of the family have ever shown they had of me, which I do assure you is a very pleasant circumstance to me. *I think the houses I have been in during my husband’s absence have been most creditable and serviceable to him, as he has been constantly kept before the great world, and passages in his letters talked of.*”

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\* Boaden’s “Life of Inchbald.”

This characteristic sketch is a justification of Mr. Kemble's choice, which was so commented on at the time of his marriage ; and if we accept Hazlitt's story,\* that the actor was attached to her before her marriage with Brereton, it is a proof of his sagacity and intelligence in selecting her for his wife. The picture of Sheridan is amusing, and the pleasure with which she tells her friend that she has not outstayed her welcome is very *naïf* and pleasing.

It was almost a fatality that the venerable old Roger Kemble should have passed away when the children whom he loved most were absent in foreign countries. That his latter days were made easy by their care we know. Mr. Boaden gives an agreeable sketch of the old gentleman sitting in his son's library, looking, in his silk skullcap, like some dignified clergyman. They all dined together, and the visitor owned that he had never seen greater ease nor higher polish than was exhibited by Mr. Kemble's father. Old Mrs. Kemble also showed wonderful energy and vivacity. Yet in carrying out their filial duties, and watching as they did over the declining years of their parents, the brother and sister showed a certain carelessness and want of discretion, which

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\* In the *London Magazine*, 1823.



as usual gave rise to stories and misrepresentations. The old man was allowed to beg and borrow; and indeed Mr. Geneste heard it openly stated in a banking-office, that his children did not sufficiently look after his wants, and save him from these humiliations. This was only one of the unfair exaggerations to which Mrs. Siddons was always to be exposed; but it is likely enough that both were too proud to interfere earnestly, or check the vagaries of dotage.\* They certainly should have interposed to stop the exhibition of decayed powers in a veteran of seventy on the boards of the Haymarket. Such shows are often painful—sometimes indecent—but were inexcusable when the sole object was to trade on public curiosity, by exhibiting “the father of Mrs. Siddons.” The event was accordingly heralded in the usual undignified fashion. He appeared on the 26th August, 1788, and was complimented in this way:—

\* Among the Winston papers I find the following:—

“5 August, 1794.

“*Messrs. Ransom, Morland, & Hammersley.*

“*Pay Roger Kemble, Esq. or Bearer, Nineteen Pounds Five Shillings for*

“RD. PEAKE, N.

“£19 5s.”

This has the air of a donation or allowance from some fund. It is indorsed on the back with Roger's signature.



“Old Mr. Kemble, the father of Mrs. Siddons, has actually determined to make a theatrical experiment on a London Theatre before he retires from the great stage of life, for the benefit of his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Kemble. As this veteran performer is near seventy years of age, such an appearance must naturally be deemed interesting *even without the consideration of his being father of the great theatrical luminary above-mentioned.*”

And again :

“To this was added *The Miller of Mansfield*, in which Mr. Kemble, sen. performed the Miller, and considering his age, gave the part with very great propriety. Here and there we could perceive the liberty of the country performer, by saying more than was set down by the author. The moral sentences with which all Mr. Dodsley’s dramatic pieces abound, well suited the sententious manner of speaking Mr. S. Kemble is accustomed to adopt ; and the whole concluded with an address to the audience, spoken by Mrs. Kemble, of which we could hear little or nothing, from the noise in the box lobby.

“Mr. Kemble, sen. was received with every possible mark of approbation that the father of Mrs. Siddons could expect.”

This veteran died on Monday, December 6th, 1802.\* John Kemble had other relations of advanced age; and only three years before, in a fire that took place at Hereford, an uncle of his, Richard Kemble, who

\* Among the Winston papers is a curious schedule of Roger's "sharings," during a strolling campaign in the year 1757, the year of John Kemble's birth. The total seems to have been about 350*l.* The following is a portion of the account, which is in Roger's own handwriting:—

"Shared in one year, from Nov. 10, 1757.

		£	s.	d.
Shrewsbury . . . .	3 Feb. . . .	4	16	6
Leominster . . . .	8 March. . . .	3	19	0
Kingston . . . . .	9 June . . . .	5	12	6
Prestayn . . . . .	7 July . . . .	1	8	6
Ludlow . . . . .	22 Dec. . . .	14	6	0
				30 2 6

Bishops Castle . . .	15 Jan. . . .	2	5	0
Coventry . . . . .	29 June . . . .	31	16	0

(To Scene Pan<sup>r</sup>. 6*s.* 6*d.*)

Stratford . . . . .	10 Aug. . . .	3	0	6
Warwick . . . . .	24 Sept. . . .	4	15	0
Shrewsbury . . . . .	3 Nov. . . . .	2	10	0
				44 6 6

Brecknock . . . . .	17 April . . . .	15	10	0
Hay . . . . .	20 May . . . .	2	3	6
Newtown . . . . .	21 July . . . .	3	16	6
Stratford (Races) . . .	15 Aug. . . . .	1	10	6
Warwick . . . . .	22 Aug. . . . .	1	5	0
Stratford . . . . .	27 Sept. . . . .	3	1	0
Warwick . . . . .	3 Feb. . . . .	9	3	6
				36 10 0

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was blind, and eighty-six years old, was burnt to death. Living in the same city also was an aunt, Mrs. Eleanor Kemble, who survived till May, 1804.

## CHAPTER V.

ELIZABETH INCHBALD.

THERE is no figure in the long line of dramatic artists more interesting than that of Mrs. Inchbald. To the patent theatres, however opposed they may seem to the principles of modern political economy, we at least owe artists of this description: persons who have worked their way steadily onward, until, chastened by this severe probation, they have secured the respect and applause, not merely of their contemporaries, but of posterity.

Nor is this connexion fanciful. The two great patent theatres seemed to hold the same relation to the profession that corporations like that of the Benchers at the various Inns do to the law. These exercise a certain control; are watchful over decency, foster an *esprit de corps* and a general high tone. The patent theatres at least maintained a certain standard of training, if genius were wanting, and stimulated the emulation of players by offering a retreat

into which it was difficult to obtain admittance. And we can see from the example of the Théâtre Français, that excellent as the average French acting is, the patent system has there produced a yet higher class of acting which has shown itself not unworthy of such protection. The lives of players of merit who have found their way to these retreats, are certain to be more varied and interesting than those of the player of the present day, who, without any probation or training, may scramble into the foremost rank.

The story of Mrs. Inchbald reads almost like a romance. Pretty, clever, agreeable, romantic, and a devotee of a religion that was then almost proscribed, starting on her career alone and friendless, it seemed a miracle that she should have escaped shipwreck. We have seen how the young Kemble was affected by her charms, and how his ambition or prudence had restrained him from an offer of marriage. When almost a child her romantic ideas had at last made her run away from home to adopt the stage, which she followed in vagabond fashion for a long time, yet without danger. Round this interesting creature fluttered admirers of the pattern then in vogue, and with the aims that were then in vogue, such as Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, doctors who prescribed

with hopes beyond their fees, persons who suited her fancy, and whom she would have willingly married. But when their real views were revealed, it was amusing to see how her indignation struggled with her good nature; how they were turned out of doors, like Sir Charles, to be forgiven later. Yet through all these perils, recurring during a long life, her name was unsullied. With a sort of *naïveté* she confessed to being quite willing to be married, and applied herself to that pursuit with an absence of affectation that is quite amusing. With this was compounded an almost Parisian devotion to the Church. Of a Sunday, on "the circuit," she would read the Mass prayers in French to Mr. Kemble and her husband, would later consult Dissenting clergymen on her doubts, not as to her own religion, but in reference to the whole scheme of Christianity. It was extraordinary how successfully she worked her way, and in all her dealings with managers, actors, and authors secured a respect and consideration which in the case of an unfortunate widow might seem hopeless. Were she merely the authoress of the charming "Simple Story" her claims upon our own generation would be very great, for it is one of those seemingly unpretending but perfect works where the author has succeeded

in her aim, which was to produce a complete and exquisitely finished little tale. It seems to reflect the delicacy of her own mind, and has the peculiar fascination which her own character always inspired. It has been said that the principal character was intended for Kemble, and though it is that of a Catholic priest who had abandoned his sacred calling to marry his ward, while Kemble had been no more than an ecclesiastical student. It seems very probable that the grave and interesting hero had been suggested by the austere-looking Kemble. A diary, which apparently was of a very candid character, was put into a bookseller's hands during her lifetime, but through some misunderstanding was not published. It seems to have been laid before Mr. Boaden, but he made but meagre use of it. According to the few entries which he gives, she appears to have found herself in the highest circles, enjoying the society of people of great rank and consideration, was sought after and asked to parties at "fashionable" houses, a position that might fairly seem incomprehensible to the untrained girls who now hold the foremost ranks of the profession, hardly one of whom could be admitted into a respectable house. She also wrote comedies, of a gay, vivacious sort, and which were highly popular.



The current of her life ran almost side by side with that of the Kembles. That John was attached to her seems almost certain; and to the end of his life, from the early days when she used to travel with him and his sister from one country town to another, his heart always turned to her. Some of the letters that passed between them and Mrs. Inchbald, during the earlier struggles of their career, are very natural and interesting—brother and sister imparting to her all their hopes and prospects with a free confidence which shows their character in a very engaging light.

“I played Hamlet in Liverpool,” wrote Mrs. Siddons to her during a country tour, “to near a hundred pounds, and wish I had taken it to myself; but the fear of charges, which, you know, are most tremendous circumstances, persuaded me to take part of a benefit with Barry, for which I have since been very much blamed; but he, I believe, was very much satisfied, and in short so am I. Strange resolutions are formed in our theatrical ministry: one of them I think very prudent—(this little rogue Harry is chattering to such a degree I scarce know what I am about)—but to proceed: our managers have determined to employ no more exotics; they have found that Miss Yonge’s late visit to us (which you must

have heard of) has rather hurt than done them service; so that Liverpool must from this time forth be content with such homely fare as we small folk can furnish to its delicate sense. . . . Present our kind compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson, and tell the former I never mention his name but I wish to be regaling with him over a pinch of his most excellent Irish snuff, which I have never had a snift of, but in idea, since I left York."

In this letter we find the peculiar charm of Mrs. Siddons's character, and which attached to her so many friends—an unfolding of her thoughts, her hopes and fears, with a pleasant confidence. Her rejoicing that the little theatre could do without "stars" was characteristic in one who was so soon to be the terror of all provincial companies. The fear of "charges, which, you know, are *most tremendous circumstances*," so openly expressed, wins her all our sympathy.

Allusion has been made to a kind of grim and forced jocularity which was the great tragedian's fashion of exhibiting his good humour. Reynolds describes him at a supper-party contributing a jovial hunting song to the entertainment, sung with extraordinary gravity, and introduced by the remark

that "it was a favourite with one of the first comic singers of the day, Mrs. Siddons." He had no voice, so the performance must have been a curious one. In the same vein, he was fond of writing "humorous" letters to his "dear Muse."

"1784.

"MY DEAR MADAM,—Was your laconic epistle designed to put me into a worse humour by disappointing all the expectations I had formed of vivacity and wit when I saw your hand in the superscription? . . . . You know, I imagine, before now that I shall be lord of your tenement in about a fortnight. I understand, moreover, that I am to enter it just as it is. You wont surely be so cruel as to be aiding or consenting to the removal of any part of the furniture. One piece there is in the house I shall be very happy, proud, transported, &c., &c., to have in my keeping; and, by the way, I can tell you, it would be very idle to keep it locked up any longer, for it must grow more and more old-fashioned every day, and by and by will be hardly fit for use. There's no persuading some folks to reason; and to be sure, people have a right to do what they please with their own. Don't you think this good nonsense? They were talking of Sir James Lowther's peerage t'other

day, and somebody asked what he was to be styled, I replied Lord-Ship. If you don't laugh at that I'll never forgive you.

“When you write to George, say I hope there will be plenty of nuts in Walnut-tree Green. Remember me to Mr. Thing-am-ee, at the Gravel Pit. Has he more than five cows? Do the horses break out of River Lea? How go on the Clubs at Sickie's, Moor Waggon, and the Harrow? Are there good prospects from the Little Clump, Great Clump, High Field, Horse Field, Long Meadow, Cow Pasture, Light Pasture, Cook's Ground, the Hurst? Beg my compliments to Rob, Tiffney, S. Padly, Ralph, Leeks, Carter, Fairs, Pratt, Sturgeon, Tiffney, and Leeks, just by Twiss.”\*

This is very ponderous jesting.

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\* Boaden's *Life of Inchbald*. When his reputation was made he would not have relished being reminded of his anxiety to know minute details of Henderson's costume and style:—“What kind of a hat does Mr. Henderson wear? what kind of a wig, of cravat, of ruffles, of clothes, of stockings, with or without embroidered clocks, square or round-toed shoes? I shall be uneasy if I have not an idea of his dress, even to the shape of his buckles, and what rings he wears on his hands . . . Will you take pains to inform me in what particular points Mr. Henderson chiefly excelled, and in what manner he executed them?”

Boaden calls the following “sportive elegance:”—“Mr. Kemble

This agreeable woman was his trusted agent for business, and when he went to travel in Spain, she carried on the negotiations for a share in Covent Garden Theatre with Harris, the manager. Long after he was married and prosperous it used to be a regular custom that she should dine with him every Sunday. But it happens in instances of these old friendships, that there often comes a season of irritation, when the labour of a life is shipwrecked. And after some five-and-twenty years, a quarrel took place between these old friends, and which, it would seem, arose between the ladies, for Kemble showed himself eager to be reconciled, though she was a little unforgiving. Nothing more piquant could be imagined than her little controversy with Colman, in reference to her remarks on his *Mountaineers*,\* for she was always capable of defending herself with spirit and effect.

She had a slight impediment in her speech, but a

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has the pleasure of Mr. Twiss's company to-day at dinner, and will be infinitely charmed to find the tenth Muse at his table also.

"Mr. Kemble would not willingly appear ceremonious, so he does not send cards to the nine sisters, as he observes the tenth never visits without them."

\* The younger Colman's style in such discussions was singularly *tranchant* and also vivacious; as we have seen it exhibited in his *Iron Chest* preface. He thought that Mrs. Inchbald's praise of



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492, NEW OXFORD STREET

MR CHARLES KEMBLE





fellow-player, who acted with her at Dublin, described how pleasant it was to see this difficulty gradually overcome, as she grew accustomed to her audience.\* Mr. Harris, of Covent Garden, at their first acquaintance, wished to be enrolled among her admirers, and signified his devotion in a rather rough fashion. She only pulled his hair violently, and thus repulsed his rude advances, and with great simplicity related her adventure, to the great amusement of the green-room.† Yet after this introduction, her relations with the manager were of a most friendly and respectful character. Other gentlemen of her acquaintance, as we have seen, “forgot themselves” in much the same fashion, whom she “forbade the house” for a time, and who on admission were forgiven, and behaved respectably ever afterwards. All this in any other character but hers might have a very doubtful air;

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Kemble’s acting in *Octavian* detracted from the merits of the play. “Pray, Madam, why should we kill the *Mountaineers* with Mr. Kemble. Has not *Octavian* been acted repeatedly, though certainly never so excellently as by Mr. Kemble, to very full houses without him?”

\* Bernard’s Reminiscences.

† “I don’t know what would have become of me if he had w—w—orn a w—w—ig!” was her comment, which became enrolled in the list of theatrical stories.

but we know, from impartial testimony, that a word was never even whispered against her good name.

Such is a sketch of a very pleasing actress, a most agreeable woman, and charming writer, whose career has added grace to the British stage, and whose example might profit the profession. On account of her close and intimate friendship with the Kembles, her story has been worth considering in a chapter by itself at this part of the narrative.\*

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\* She died in 1821, two years before her old friend Kemble, and reached a ripe old age.

## CHAPTER VI.

## KEMBLE AT COVENT GARDEN.

WHEN Kemble returned to town, two dinner parties celebrated the new alliance—one given by the managers of Covent Garden to their rival, Sheridan, who, as the bottle went round, became very sarcastic on their new-born friendship—"Fellows," he said, contemptuously, "who have hated each other all their lives!" "But not during these last six weeks," answered Harris, pleasantly. The other was given by Kemble himself to the performers who were now to be under his command, among whom Cooke was included. The party was pleasant; but few suspected how much the convivial powers of the great actor had developed. This "gift," as it was considered in those hard-drinking days, helped to soften much of the prejudice excited by his austere manners.\*

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\* Mr. Taylor recalled the first night of *The Mountaineers*, when Kemble asked him to go to Mrs. Stephen Kemble's in the Haymarket,

On the twenty-fourth of September, 1803, he made his first appearance at Covent Garden, in *Hamlet*, to great applause ; and three days later his sister made hers in *Isabella*. This was exactly repeating the choice they had made when appearing for the first time at Drury Lane. His management was to be marked with great tact and moderation. In his relations with Cooke—an undisciplined, jealous, and disorderly character, with “a party” to support him—it was anticipated he would have infinite embarrassment. The former, as soon as he heard of Kemble’s appointment, said to Mr. John Taylor that he now expected to lose all his characters. For “Black Jack”—a nickname which he seems to have invented for Kemble—was the only one he feared to encounter. He might reasonably be apprehensive ; and certainly, a player of such gifts, with power placed in his

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and remained there sitting up until seven o’clock in the morning. The same friend would tell how Kemble went to dine with Charles Burney in the Hammersmith Road, and remained there until five in the morning, when he returned in a fisherman’s light cart, and was driven to Billingsgate, where he was recognised by the fish salesmen, and presented with a turbot. On another occasion, at a tavern club in Turnham Green, he and Colman sat out all the members, and remained till twelve the following day. This was evidence of high qualifications.

hands, might prove a formidable rival. Nothing could have less foundation. Almost the first act of "Black Jack's" was to get ready *Pizarro*, and put his own character, of which he made so much, into Cooke's hands. Tremendous force and rough declamation might be expected from the latter; but when he made his appearance before the audience he was incapable of either speaking or acting. He was in one of those disgraceful and disreputable fits which the indulgence of an audience could then tolerate, and which his example first taught them to tolerate—an example, too, which a player like Edmund Kean was to imitate. Any exhibition of drunkenness is offensive, but a drunken *actor*, staggering about in his stage finery, and hiccuping unintelligible sounds, is a revolting spectacle. On this occasion the manager made the conventional apology that Mr. Cooke was really unwell "and unable to proceed." Yet the man had such fine rude power and dramatic genius coarsely overlaid as it was, that the too indulgent audience readily forgave him. Cooke always affected to growl his dislike to "Black Jack," who was never betrayed into overstepping a calm, and perhaps quietly contemptuous, treatment of the other—assuming a quiet superiority. This forbearance was to be often

tried severely—as on the morning of the performance of Kelly's opera, *Adrian*, when Cooke, having to take the leading character, came to rehearsal so intoxicated as to be hardly able to stand. Kelly, on this exhibition, said he would not allow his piece to be sacrificed, but Kemble insisted that it should be acted—that a postponement would injure the theatre. Mr. Harris, the chief proprietor, was sent for and took Kelly's view; Cooke all this time pouring out a volley of drunken abuse on his favourite object of dislike, "Black Jack," and of which Kemble took not the least notice. Mr. Harris said that an apology should be made and the piece be put off, but Kemble persisted fiercely in his opposition, and went so far as to say that he would go out and tell the audience the real reason. Harris protested angrily that he was the chief proprietor, and should be obeyed. "And I, too, sir," replied Kemble, "am a proprietor, and have borrowed a large sum of money to place in the concern. How am I to repay this sum—to repay it to those who have trusted in my honour—if I allow of proceedings which I know will eventually bring ruin and disgrace to the theatre? The play must and *shall* be acted!" But Brandon, the well-known boxkeeper, coaxed away Cooke to bed, wrapped wet towels about

his head, awoke him at five, and gave him some coffee. Cooke was then dressed, and only half sobered, pushed on to the stage. The lights, the audience, seemed to give him back his intelligence, and he acted the part fairly, though he cut out half the plot, and had all the actors at their wits' end to repair his mistakes. Thus Kemble's firmness prevailed and was justified. At the same time his reasoning could hardly be defended, as more injury was likely to accrue to the theatre from the exhibition of a drunken actor than from the postponement of a play. He exposed himself, too, to a misconstruction of his motives, which in another might seem probable enough, but which *he* could afford to despise—namely, a wish to help Cooke to compromise himself.

But more mortifying than would have been the rivalry of one with even twice the capability of Cooke, was to be the eclipse of the great brother and sister under conditions ludicrously contemptible. Both were to pass into forgetfulness, while the town went “horn mad” after the new player as much as it had done after Mrs. Siddons on her first appearance. The intellectual, the beautiful, the politician and statesman, all were filled with the new *fureur*. Fox turned round to one behind him, and, in rapture, was heard



to exclaim, "This is finer than Garrick!" The crush in the boxes and pit was terrific, and genteel intruders fought for their places with police officers sent to turn them out. For a season the town talked of nothing else. When the prodigy fell ill all the ladies of fashion and beauty crowded to his door with inquiries. When he got well Northcote painted him in an absurdly classical attitude. Both patent theatres—Drury Lane first, and Covent Garden later—strove for his services. Historians of the stage must blush a little to have to acknowledge that an enthusiasm exceeding what was excited by Garrick or Siddons was caused by a little Belfast boy of thirteen—the famous Master Betty—and that his twenty-eight nights' playing brought Sheridan nearly 20,000*l.* receipts. It was not a little mortifying for Kemble, when this lad came to his theatre, to have to make arrangements gravely for "mounting" all the important tragedies, in which the players were nearly twice the height of the hero, and specially mortifying it must have been for the actors of the great theatre themselves, who had to minister to a mere prodigy.

Mrs. Inchbald was present at the first appearance of the Phenomenon, and was greatly fatigued by his measured "preaching-like tones" during the earlier

scenes. She then went behind the scenes, and in her vivacious manner describes the crowd of rapturous admirers who were congregated there—some vociferating that Garrick had come to life again, while the more sagacious said that the bottle conjuror had been revived. She owned, however, that in the later acts he exhibited great fire and spirit, and an impassioned variety. The lady added this lively comment:—“This is a clever little boy, and had I never seen boys act I might have thought him exquisite.”

Kemble, however, could afford to wait disdainfully until the infatuation had passed by. Neither he nor his sister condescended to follow the public taste, though it was characteristic that Cooke, with all his drunken bluster, should have had to play with the prodigy. It is probable, however, that it was more his own lack of self-respect rather than any compulsion that subjected him to the humiliation. Mrs. Siddons openly professed her dissatisfaction, pronouncing him merely “a pretty boy.” It was a discreditable folly, and could be matched by nothing in the history of the stage. An absurd caricature appeared, at the great actor’s expense, and which was not wholly undeserved—a picture of Master Betty and Kemble mounted on the same horse, the former

riding in front. Master Betty is saying to him, "When two ride the same horse, one must ride behind." There was also one of Master Betty bestriding the space between the roofs of both theatres, while Kemble and Sheridan stand ruefully underneath.\*

But the craze for thrusting an "infant phenomenon" on the town did not die out with this Betty folly. It is not creditable to Kemble, with his silent protest against this degradation of the stage, that he should, within a year, have attempted to thrust a second prodigy of the kind on the public. A Miss Mudie had some reputation in the provinces. She was about eight years old, and attracted an enormous house, exhibiting a surprising assurance and infantine confidence, which, perhaps, disgusted the audience, for presently great contempt, laughter, and hissing broke out. The prodigy came forward, and said pertly that she had done nothing to offend them, and hoped they would turn out those persons "who had been

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\* The collection of Kemble caricatures is a large one, the family stateliness and supposed love of money provoking the wit of the satirists. Kemble's Roman nose and "shoulder-of-mutton" whiskers were always to be recognised. He himself collected them diligently, and would show them to his friends with great enjoyment.

sent to hiss her." This produced a fresh burst of laughter and hissing, on which Kemble came forward and made, as he always did, a most judicious address. It is surprising how well-chosen and appropriate were his topics and words.\* He said that this young lady's success in the country theatres had led her friends to hope that her merits would be sure to pass the tribunal of their judgment. The proprietors had, of course, no wish to press any species of entertainment on their patrons that seemed to be disapproved, but still he thought they might fairly ask that the young lady should be allowed to finish her performance. A fresh storm of disapprobation burst out. Again Kemble addressed them, and doing battle for the unhappy prodigy, promised that she would be withdrawn, if she was only allowed to go through the rest of the piece. But nothing could propitiate this unreasonable audience. The phenomenon was driven off with contempt, and was never heard of again.† Such

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\* Only once can I find that he was considered to have blundered, and that was during the agitation of the O.P. riots, when he asked the "ladies and gentlemen" what "they wanted," instead of "what was their pleasure."

† Play-goers of our day will remember two little American children who played in *The Young Couple*, and who went round the

things are always more odd than entertaining. It is curious to see how these evidences of false taste and decay on the stage were reacting on the audience, whose sense of self-respect and decorum was impaired in proportion. The spectacle of a tragedian unable to articulate from drink, of an immodest woman like Mrs. Johnstone braving a disapproving audience, of a clever boy playing with full-grown tragedians, was to bear fruit in the license of a familiar audience, who treated their entertainers as they themselves were treated.

This was now to prove the beginning of a series of disorders riotous beyond precedent; and about this time (1806), when Kemble and his sister were giving their fine performance of *Coriolanus*, an apple was flung at them from the galleries, an outrage which produced a spirited speech from the manager. It was said, indeed, that it was intended for some noisy ladies in the boxes, but this is a wantonness in a disorderly theatrical audience difficult to account for. Kemble's protest was admirable :—

“Ladies and Gentlemen,—I have been many years acquainted with the benevolence and liberality of a

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kingdom giving their juvenile but really curious performance. One of these grew up into the Miss Bateman of *Leah* celebrity.

London audience, but we cannot proceed this evening with the performance unless we are protected, especially when ladies are thus exposed to insult."

Some one from the gallery then interrupted—"We can't hear you." He replied, with increased spirit, "I will raise my voice, and the galleries *shall* hear me. This protection is what the audience owe it to themselves to grant; what the performers, for the credit of their profession, have a *right* to demand, and what I will venture so far to assert, that, on the part of the proprietors, I have offered 100 guineas to any man who will disclose the ruffian who has been guilty of this act." Undismayed by murmurs, he concluded, "I throw myself, ladies and gentlemen, upon the high sense of breeding that distinguishes a London audience, and I hope I shall never be wanting in my duty to the public; but nothing shall induce me to suffer insult." This protest is a model for firmness and spirit, and wonderful considering that it was impromptu.

But his great sister was to be more than compensated for these occasional public affronts. No actress was ever so gratified by the warmth of personal friendships, with attentions from persons of consideration, as Mrs. Siddons, and these were not by

way of patronage, but from a sincere pleasure in her society and respect for her character. She was to be met at Strawberry Hill—then in Mrs. Damer's possession—and in such company as that of the late Louis Philippe and the Prince Regent. The latter often invited her to the Pavilion at Brighton; and, it was emphasized as a special compliment, was studious in his respect. Her bad health and that of her husband seemed to require perpetual change of place. She had lived in the Strand, had removed thence to Gower Street, from Gower Street to Great Marlborough Street, and now she gave up this house and went into lodgings with her friend, Miss Wilkinson, in Prince's Street, Hanover Square. Her husband, growing more and more infirm, passed to and fro between London and Bath, and those cottages in the country, at Hampstead or Westbourne, she had to hire. Her own sufferings all the time were extreme, from lumbago, and the affection in her lip, which she attempted to cure by such a quack remedy as electricity. Thus, here were two almost helpless invalids laid up together. But at last Mr. Siddons found that the only place where he found relief was at Bath, and at Bath he determined to fix himself altogether. This really unavoidable separation—by the



law of Mrs. Siddons's ill-fortune—at once set an ill-natured story afloat, that a formal separation had taken place. Mr. Boaden, indeed, states almost distinctly that they found it impossible “to get on” together, while Mr. Campbell gives the matter a flat denial. But there can be no doubt that there was some foundation for the story. Mr. Siddons seems to have been selfish, and wasteful in speculations with her money, but full of a petty sensitiveness as to her disposal of what was her own; and in some letters which got into print she was said to have complained bitterly of his conduct. He seemed to be jealous as to the control of her earnings; and the remonstrance she wrote to him on so delicate a subject somehow seems to throw light upon their relations—

“My dear Sid,—I am really sorry that my little flash of merriment should have been taken so seriously, for I am sure, however we may differ in trifles, *we can never cease to love each other*. You wish me to say what I expect to have done—I can expect nothing more than you yourself have designed me in your will. Be (as you ought to be) the master of all while God permits, but, in case of your death, only let me be put out of the power of any person living. This is all that I desire; and I think that

you cannot but be convinced that it is reasonable and proper. Your ever affectionate and faithful—S. S.”

But the character of the man shows us that it would have been difficult to live with him in harmony.\*

During the summer of 1805, this untiring woman was once more travelling to Edinburgh and Dublin. During the next year she played her *Volumnia* no less than seventeen times. She was now beginning to think seriously of retirement; all she purposed was to get together a small addition to her income. “It is better,” she wrote, “to work hard for a short time, and have done with it. If I can but add three hundred a year to my present income, I shall be perfectly well provided for; and I am resolved, when that is accomplished, to make no more positive engagements in summer. I trust that God in his

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\* Mr. Campbell’s proof of their conjugal harmony is, oddly enough, based upon a little poem of seven stanzas, addressed to the cottage at Westbourne. The only stanza in which Mrs. Siddons’s name is found is the last :—

“No, she that made it what it is

Has greatness that makes up for all.”

“Let the reader judge for himself,” says Mr. Campbell, “whether these verses be in the style of a man parting from his wife on unpleasant terms.”

great mercy will enable me to do it; and then, oh, how lazy, and saucy, and happy will I be! You will have something to do, I can tell you, my dear, to keep me in order."

Worn down by ill-health and domestic anxieties, it was no wonder that she turned to any resource that could give her ease, and a lively letter from her friend Mrs. Inchbald shows how much she suffered, and to what curious remedies she was turning for relief. "Mrs. Siddons is restored as by a miracle. She had a nervous affection from her hip to her toe, which made that side totally useless, yet in torturing pain that kept her sleepless for months. All medical art, such as embrocations, &c., failed. She heard of a new-invented machine that performed surprising cures by electricity. Her physicians all told her such an operation would make her disorder still worse. Her surgeon, Sir James Earle, said, No; but he assured her it would do her no good. On his word, fearing no harm, she tried it, and was almost instantly cured. But the agony she suffered in the trial she describes as if burning lead was running through her veins where the sparks touched; and Mr. Siddons says her shrieks were such that he really expected the mob would break open the door, and think he was killing her.

“By - the - bye, what wicked accusations have been laid against this woman! Poor John Bull loves to set up, but then he loves equally to pull down.”

After her nearly forty years' service, it was time to think of repose. In December, 1807, she hurried to Bath to see her husband, with whom she remained six weeks. She then left him to visit Edinburgh. While she was there news came to her of his death, on March 11, 1808. It of course interrupted her Scotch performances, and about a fortnight later she was able to write with due calmness of this misfortune to Mrs. Piozzi. It is curious to contrast her philosophic regret for the husband with her almost despair at the loss of her child.

“How unwearied is your goodness to me, my dear friend \* \* \* ! There is something so awful in this sudden dissolution of so long a connexion that I shall feel it longer than I shall speak of it. May I die the death of my honest worthy husband! and may those to whom I am dear, remember me when I am gone as I remember him,—forgetting and forgiving all my errors, and recollecting only my quietness of spirit and singleness of heart. Remember me to your dear Mr. Piozzi. My head is still so dull with this stunning

surprise that I cannot see what I write. Adieu, dear soul ! do not cease to love your friend, S. S."

Here ended the old romance which had begun some thirty years before, when the young actor was paying his addresses to the manager's beautiful daughter, and when she was ready to brave all for his sake. To him she had written verses, very different from the doggrel in which he had told an audience of her treatment of him. Jones, a member of Roger Kemble's corps, long preserved these little ephemeral ballads ; and among them a little song of hers, addressed to her lover, and which breathes a certain delicacy and tenderness. As it has never been published, it may be inserted here, and will serve as a gracious epitaph for her husband :—

" Say not, Strephon, I'm untrue,  
When I only think of you ;  
If you do but think of me  
As I of you, then shall you be  
Without a rival in my heart,  
Which ne'er can play a tyrant's part.

" Trust me, Strephon, with thy love—  
I swear by Cupid's bow above,  
Nought shall make me e'er betray  
Thy passion till my dying day :  
If I live, or if I die,  
Upon my constancy rely."

Nor were there wanting troubles of a kind that fall with special severity on persons who hold a public position, and the suffering from which is in direct proportion to that publicity. The extraordinary success and prosperity of the two great chiefs of the Kembles had excited envy and dislike; and the disgrace and degradation of an inferior member of the family was seized on with delight, and ingeniously tortured into a means of annoyance. Mrs. Siddons was unfortunate in the helplessness of the long family train, in addition to her own husband and children, who were more or less helpless, and who seemed to demand rather than ask the aid of their fortunate but hard-working sister. This tax she might have borne cheerfully, but it was a sore trial to have to read in all the papers, as Mrs. Siddons had done in 1783, an advertisement of the following description :—

“DONATIONS IN FAVOUR OF MRS. CURTIS, YOUNGEST SISTER OF  
MRS. SIDDONS.

A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL, whose humanity is far more extensive than her means, having taken the case of the unfortunate  
MRS. CURTIS

into consideration, pitying her youth, respecting her talents for the stage, which unhappily misfortune has rendered useless, and desirous to restore a useful Member to Society, earnestly entreats the interference of a generous Public in her behalf, that she may be

enabled, by the efforts of humanity, to procure such necessities as may be requisite to relieve her immediate distress, and for her getting her bread by needlework, artificial flowers, &c., in which she is well skilled, and in which she will be happy to be employed.

Mrs. CURTIS is the youngest sister of Mess. KEMBLE and Mrs. SIDDONS, whom she has repeatedly solicited for relief, which they have flatly refused her; it therefore becomes necessary to solicit, in her behalf, the benevolent generosity of that Public who have so liberally supported THEM.

‘Deny not to Affliction, Pity’s tear,  
For Virtue’s fairest when she aids Distress!’

Mrs. CURTIS’s Search after Happiness.

Donations will be thankfully received at Mr. Ayre’s, Printer of the *Sunday London Gazette and Weekly Monitor*, &c., No. 5, Bridges-street, opposite Drury Lane Theatre; and at No. 21, King-street, Covent-garden.”

It was evident that the private individual, whoever he was, was more actuated by a wish to annoy Mrs. Curtis’s sister, than by charity. This lady was said to be lame, or she too would have tried her powers on the stage. It was presently stated that “Mrs. Curtis, the youngest sister of Mrs. Siddons,” a designation never omitted, “was now in great distress; it was said the family had done something to keep her from starving, *which is not true.*” This was publicly stated in the *Morning Post*. But as was before hinted, there was a depth of degradation still lower in reserve for her. The quack Graham was



then delivering some lectures on health and beauty, and was said, though it has been denied, to have secured the services of the beautiful Lady Hamilton as a model, before she had been raised to that rank. He now hired the services of this outcast in nearly the same capacity, and led off his programmes with Mrs. Siddons's youngest sister :—

“POSITIVELY THE LAST NIGHT.

**M**RS. SIDDONS'S Youngest Sister, Mrs. CURTIS, (ran the notice of the entertainment,) desires most respectfully to inform the Public, that **THIS EVENING** she will read a **LECTURE** at the **TEMPLE of HEALTH** in **PALL-MALL**, on the present state and influence of **WOMEN** on Society in England, in France, in Spain, and in the Eastern Countries; and on the relative and reciprocal duties, which are incumbent on **BOTH** sexes, to advance their particular as well as mutual happiness. In the course of the Lecture will be introduced a few words reprehending the present indecent and unnatural phrenzy of the British Stage of turning **Men into Women, and Women into Men.** As this Lecture is perfectly chaste and delicate, and extremely interesting, and as everything will be conducted with the utmost decorum, Mrs. Curtis humbly hopes to be honoured with the countenance and support of Ladies of humanity, rank, and character. The Temple, which is now embellished in a style of magnificence and brilliancy, far superior to any Royal Palace in the world, will, as usual, be highly illuminated with wax. The Lecture will begin precisely at Seven o'Clock.

Admission Two Shillings.

N.B. The Lecture being received four nights by a numerous audience of Ladies and Gentlemen of rank and character, with the heartiest approbation and most universal applause, it will be repeated **THIS Evening.**

\* \* \* As a proper supplement to Mrs. Curtis's Lecture, Dr. Graham proposes, after the Lecture, to deliver a Paraphrased Oration, from the Apocrypha, in praise of the Fair Sex; in which will be demonstrated the sovereign and irresistible influence of Female Beauty and goodness over the hearts and fortunes of men.

† || † The lease of Dr. Graham's house expiring in a few weeks, he is determined to leave London; and soon after Christmas to retire with his family to Edinburgh, to resume the regular practice of a Physician, and to deliver Lectures to the Medical Students at that University, on the prevention and cure of diseases."

The lecture was duly puffed and applauded, still with the same view of annoying the actress.

"Mrs. *Curtis*, the youngest sister of Mrs. *Siddons*, last night delivered a lecture 'On the Influence of Women on Society,' at the Temple of Health, Pall Mall, and acquitted herself to the entire satisfaction of a numerous and polite auditory. It is but justice to observe that the utmost modesty and delicacy pervade the whole of this lecture, and, indeed, if we may judge from the manners and deportment of Mrs. *Curtis*, she is the last person of whom any thing indelicate can be conceived. She was received with that tenderness, and attended to with that earnestness, which her misfortunes naturally excite, and we are happy to find that the public by their patronage, are likely to restore to society, one of its members who has every appearance of possessing all the amiable

virtues of the sex, as well as talents and genius, which if not eclipsed by misfortune, would transmit her name with splendour to posterity."

After this exhibition, it is hardly surprising to find it stated that she sank yet lower. Efforts were made, as Doctor Doran states, to reclaim her; but without success. To use the grotesque language of one of the journals of the day, "*she could not conform to modesty, though offered a genteel annuity on that condition.*" She had however, a knack of versifying, and some little talent for romance writing, which she turned to profit. The very year after Mrs. Siddons had made her great impression in London, this sister issued a little volume, now as rare as her brother John's suppressed volume, the titlepage of which, ran: "Poems on Miscellaneous subjects, by Ann Curtis, sister of Mrs. Siddons. 'Oh lov'd simplicity be thou the prize.' London, Printed for the Author." It was dedicated to that universal patroness, the Duchess of Devonshire, in an address which sets out that some were written at the age of fourteen, and others "under a complication of difficulties."\*

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\* Two stanzas, the first and the last, of an Elegy on the Death of Garrick, will be a favourable specimen of her quality:—

But her life was soon to be chequered by incidents of a ghastly sort. It was presently stated—and not contradicted, that she had attempted to poison herself in Westminster and had been with difficulty saved. This again was used to excite prejudice against her brother and sister. It is probable indeed that they treated such a disgrace to the family name with an austere and injudicious severity. But with such incorrigible characters experience shows that it is impossible to deal. Attempts at reclamation are often so much encouragement.

In a few years, when perhaps her name had been forgotten, she was recalled to public notice by the following shocking adventure. The account ran:—

“MRS. CURTIS.

“The recent disaster which happened to this

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“Let every tongue be mute—for Garrick's dead,  
The child of nature seeks his native skies;  
With him, alas! the Graces all are fled,  
In him is lost whatever taste could prize.

“But soft awhile—behold yon opening sky!  
See, where he mingles with the blest above!  
O, Grave! where is thy mighty victory,  
Since death's dread sting creates immortal love?”

In the *Winston miscellany* are many little “proof-sheets” of the newspaper muse.

*eccentric* character, deserves to be recorded, not less for the *singular* circumstances which attended it, than for its melancholy effects.

“A gentleman who set out from the Bush Tavern, at Staines, on Thursday evening, in a chaise, procured a pistol from one of the waiters, to protect him on the road to London. Having no cause to use it, when he reached Hampstead, he attempted to discharge the pistol, and after snapping it several times in vain, he laid it aside, execrating the waiter for giving him one, which, of course, he did not suppose was charged !

“On his arrival in town he stopped at a well-known *Bagnio*, under the Piazza, where he unfortunately met the celebrated Mrs. Curtis :—After some conversation between the parties, the gentleman, with a view to frighten his fair companion, absolutely clapped the pistol to his mouth, and snapped it several times :—Mrs. Curtis ridiculed his absurd conduct, and said, if it was charged he would be afraid to handle it.—‘Charged or not,’ he replied, ‘dam’me, I will frighten you.’ He then presented it at her, pulled the trigger, and lodged the contents in her face !

“The pistol was charged with shot. Her right eye was driven from the socket, and her face exhibited an indescribably shocking spectacle !

“She however at present barely exists, and Mr. Cruikshank, who attends her, has no hopes of her recovery.

“What makes this accident truly to be lamented is, that the wretched victim, is a woman of *uncommon intellect*, and a *proud and strong mind*. If her avocation has been *immoral*, it has been excited by poignant distress, for her vices were not so much founded in the errors of her *own nature*, as they were excited by the *avarice of her nearest relatives* !

“With abilities more splendid for the stage than any of her family, she was deprived of procuring a livelihood by a decent and honourable profession, in consequence of a trifling imperfection in her person.

“The story of her having taken poison in Westminster Abbey, is fresh in most persons’ minds ; and those who have seen the effusions of her muse in print, must sigh for her foibles, while they shed a tear in reflecting on her sufferings—her persecutions—and her misfortunes !”

This statement gave the unfortunate woman an opportunity of bearing testimony to the kindness of her relations, and of refuting the unworthy calumnies which she had allowed to be heaped upon them. She wrote at once to the *Morning Herald* :—

“The circumstances of the accident which has befallen me, published in yesterday’s *Herald*, are very much exaggerated; and the blame laid upon my family on my account, entirely groundless; my relations never shut their hearts against me, and are now alleviating my misfortunes by the *tenderest attentions*.  
“ANN CURTIS.”

Afterwards she was allowed a small annuity by Mrs. Siddons of 20*l.*, which meagre stipend was continued to her by the last will of the great actress. In her latter days she eked out a miserable subsistence by writing some poor novels, and the name of “Ann of Swansea” became known at the circulating libraries. She seems to have exchanged her name for that of Hatton. She is described in 1819 by a Mr. Gattie as “living at Swansea. She is allowed something by the family, by which she is compelled to live 150 miles from London. She squints—a large woman, writes novels, &c.” But she was destined to make the “family” uneasy all their lives:—for she lived until October, 1838. There were people who were interested in her and who pitied her, and to one of these she wrote just before her death, a rather pathetic protest:—“When I am dead, the letters that



I have preserved for fifty years, will clearly demonstrate that the errors and indiscretions of a girl of sixteen did not deserve so long a life of abandonment." It might have been that a little less severity might have brought her back to the straight path ; but this closes a very painful history.

Stephen Kemble, the third of the brothers who had come before the public, was altogether of an inferior degree. His reputation was more a social one ; and he had a stock of joviality and good stories which was at the service of a large crowd of friends and acquaintances. For the brother of a successful brother there is always a prospect of advancement, as in the case of George Garrick, who became his brother's secretary and "factotum." Stephen had none of the steady qualities which would fit him for such an office. Such as he did possess would hardly have recommended him to the confidence of his brother John.

He had been apprenticed to an apothecary : but the family passion soon broke out, and he went away to join one of the innumerable strolling parties then wandering over the country. Nearly all the memoirs and recollections left by members of this nomad tribe, contain some characteristic adventure of this well-

known character.\* These were distinguished by a certain pleasant eccentricity. As when he came to join his manager without his coat, and explained that it had been detained by a tavern-keeper in payment for a glass of ale. "Curse my coat," said the actor, "what is it to my feelings!"—an expression that became a favourite one in the district. At the Dublin Theatre, when he was playing Shylock, he was put out by the constant interruptions of a man in the gallery, whom he silenced by a ready interpolation. "Until thou canst rail the seal off this bond, thou, and that noisy fellow up there, but offend'st thy lungs," &c. He travelled over the south of Ireland with his brother, contributing much to the entertainment of the party. He got an engagement in London at the time that his brother made his first appearance at Drury Lane, passed to the Haymarket, and, making but little impression in town, became manager of some northern provincial theatre. A very scandalous episode in the history of the Scotch stage was a contest which Mrs. Esten, the manageress of the Edinburgh Theatre, carried on against him. She was a handsome woman, who enjoyed the power-

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\* See Ryley, Bernard, Taylor, Bannister, Dibdin, and many more.



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*Pat. Staff*



ful "protection" of the Duke of Hamilton, against whom her husband brought an action in the law courts, in which he was nonsuited. In so strait-laced a capital all this sounds amusing; but Stephen Kemble found himself assisted in this battle for the patent by another duke, the Duke of Northumberland, and finally fought her out of the field. In 1803 he found himself at Drury Lane Theatre, where he obtained the doubtful notoriety, always associated with his name, of playing Falstaff "without stuffing." This compliment has been repeated again and again, and the old playgoer, when Stephen Kemble's name is mentioned, is sure to add this panegyric. It might prefigure, in very odious shape, the "realism" that has lately taken possession of the stage; and when real cabs and practicable houses are received with favour, a genuine paunch might have fair claims to consideration. He married a lady of great attractions, Miss Satchell, the daughter of a musical instrument maker, and whom Mr. Boaden styles "that dear and lovely innocent." But to the end of his life his Falstaff "without stuffing" was the claim he put forward to the attention of the public.

## CHAPTER VII.

## BURNING OF COVENT GARDEN THEATRE.

A LARGE theatre is always the most precarious of speculations, but there is one special incident to which it is exposed, and which seems to be fated, as it were, for great houses—their destruction by fire. Covent Garden has been burnt down twice; the Haymarket Opera House twice; Drury Lane once. This fatality seems so fixed and certain that the proprietors of Drury Lane might now reasonably be on their guard; as a theatre which has stood for some sixty years has enjoyed more than the legitimate span of existence. Considering the vast amount of property, scenery, dresses, decorations, &c., such a building contains, it would be impossible to insure it fully without seriously affecting profits. This chance of ruin always hangs over the proprietors, and, it would seem, no precautions can guard against it.

The season of 1808 had commenced on Sept. 8th with *M. M.*, and twelve days later, as the market at

Covent Garden was waking up in its morning life the Great Theatre was found to be on fire. No water was to be obtained, and by seven o'clock the roof had fallen in. Some unfortunate firemen who had brought their engines under the Colonnade, so as to play on the galleries, were killed by the fall of a burning roof. Others, who had ventured too near, were scalded to death by the steam, so that some twenty persons lost their lives. The loss of property was immense. The insurances were but for 50,000*l*. The actresses' jewels, the performers' valuable wardrobes, Handel's organ, the wines of the Beef Steak Club, valued at 1500*l*., Opera scores of Handel, Arne, and others, original MSS. of plays, made up a series of losses of the most disastrous kind.

For Kemble it was a terrible blow. He could not yet have repaid his friend the loan advanced; and after the labour of thirty years had now to begin the world again. Mr. Boaden, who called on the very next morning to offer his sympathy, gives a curious picture of a ruined family: Mrs. Kemble bewailing their fate; Charles Kemble sitting ruefully by; the great actor, in one of his mysterious moods, before a glass gloomily affecting to shave himself. He presently burst into a sort of inflated speech.<sup>^</sup> Yes,



it has perished—that magnificent theatre! It is gone, with all its treasures of every description ;” which he proceeded to describe in their order of importance. “That Library, which contained all those immortal productions of our countrymen, &c. That wardrobe, &c.—Scenery, the triumph of the art. . . . Of all this vast treasure, nothing now remains but the arms of England over the entrance of the theatre, *and the Roman eagle standing solitary in the market-place.*” That such an oration should be made by one in his condition seems a phenomenon ; but, as we have seen, there was this curious species of inflation in his daily life which he seemed to borrow from the stage, and which, indeed, is indirect proof of his true and conscientious devotion to his art. In the same way as his sister, he always kept himself recollected for some time before the play began and during the intervals between the acts. In this he differed from Elliston, who, as in the well-known story, fancied he was a *real* sovereign when acting in a stage coronation, and blessed his people—in the Pit ; whereas Kemble, off the stage, fancied himself one of his own Roman chiefs.

When later, on this gloomy occasion, Lord Mountjoy came in and spoke of the public sympathy and gratitude he was destined to receive, the actor in-

interrupted him in the same lofty strain. "Gratitude, my Lord! Christ was crucified, De Witt was assassinated; so much for the world and the people!" This in other men less genuine would be laughable. Gratitude, however, and sympathy too, were not wanting. Mr. Boaden alludes, with a reverence that seems almost awe-stricken, to "the munificent conduct of the first person in the realm! the *delicacy* with which the aid was given, the princely charm which ensured its reception." It is hard to understand what this means, as Kemble could not have been in want of merely temporary assistance for his mere daily needs; and a large and substantial sum, it was beyond the power and perhaps the inclination, of the first gentleman in Europe to offer. But this substantial aid did come from another quarter, and the story is a curious illustration of how often bread cast upon the waters in the shape of small services gracefully rendered, will return to the giver.

The incident, now some five-and-twenty years old, has been mentioned, of Kemble's being obliged by Lord Percy at the Coventry Theatre with the services of a few dragoons, to give effect to a theatrical battle. Years afterwards this nobleman, now become Duke of Northumberland, sent to beg that he would give

some lessons in elocution to his son. Kemble made some difficulties; but presently recalling the incident of the soldiers, whose assistance had been so graciously accorded, agreed to waive his objections, and gave some instructions to the young lord. On the burning of the theatre the Duke found the opportunity for a noble return. He wrote to Kemble, and reminding him of this trifling service, which another actor would have been only too glad to render, expressed his deep sympathy, and offered a loan of 10,000*l.*, on his simple bond, if such would be of any use. This was real munificence. Kemble at first hesitated to accept, as he felt he might not be able to pay the interest; but the Duke declared that he should never be pressed. A few weeks later, on the day the first stone of the new theatre was laid, he cancelled the bond, and made him a present of the whole sum!

It was a foolish bit of "finessing" to rest this noble testimonial on the balancing of such trifling services as the assistance of a few soldiers, or a few lessons in elocution. It is quite plain that the Duke wished to show his sense of Kemble's merits, public and private, and took this handsome and sufficient mode of doing so. But all players are not a little





inclined to prefer recognition of their social, rather than of their professional gifts, and Kemble would seem to have preferred that this present should be considered to be the result of a series of mutual obligations. These are very pardonable little weaknesses; but he could not complain if the public had its jest upon the subject. It was regarded as a fresh proof of the Kemble eagerness for money; and of their proverbial fortune in obtaining it. Accordingly, Gilray exercised his coarse but vigorous pencil on the incident, and in a popular caricature exhibited the whole family at the gate of Northumberland House, receiving the Duke's bounty, in the attitude of grateful mendicants. This was but the commencement of a series of such prints; and it became a favourite subject of ridicule to represent the whole family clustered together and in some absurd position.

The burnt-out players had passed to the Operahouse, and preparations were at once made for establishing a new theatre. Fifty thousand pounds was soon subscribed; nearly as much was received from the insurance companies, and on December 30, 1808, the first stone was laid by the Prince of Wales with great magnificence. It was also made a sort of



Masonic festival, to add to the splendour of the occasion. Kemble had been admitted into the order only the night before. All the actors and actresses were assembled; Mrs. Siddons bearing a nodding plume of ominous black feathers, while her brother, who had risen from his sick bed, had to stand under the torrents of rain in white silk stockings and pumps. Here again we may contrast this honour paid to the stage with the state of things in our time, when no one would dream of celebrating the founding of a playhouse with more ceremonial than would attend the laying the first stone of a shop or warehouse.

The new house was completed within an incredibly short space of time. In little more than eight months from the day it was commenced, it rose into the handsome building, which was to stand for nearly fifty years and then be consumed like its predecessor, by fire. But as it was rising the extraordinary circumstance took place of the neighbouring great playhouse in Drury Lane, being also burnt to the ground. The old Opera-house had been burnt down already, and so had the Pantheon, Astley's Amphitheatre, a theatre at Manchester, and now Drury Lane was to swell the list. It was amazing this round of theatrical conflagration; and though people were inclined to



set it down as the work of incendiaries, that solution seems scarcely probable. The burning of Drury Lane was virtually the closing of Sheridan's career. With his inexhaustible wallet of shifts and devices, and possibly with that new comedy, fragments of which were found among his papers, the enterprise might have contrived to stagger on for some time longer; but when the Apollo that crowned his noble playhouse fell in with a crash, it brought down with it all his fortunes. With this disastrous finale we may also glance at the conclusion of his financial connexion with this enterprise, and it will be seen how cleverly the proprietor of a theatre, for which he had scarcely paid anything, contrived to have his rights considered and his claims handsomely indemnified.

When Mr. Whitbread's committee had settled to commence a new theatre, it was found that a sum of 400,000*l.* would be necessary for the rebuilding, for the various debts, purchase of the patent, &c. They discovered that arrears amounting to nearly 50,000*l.* were owing to the debenture-holders, whose money had built the late theatre; and they valued Sheridan's and his partner's patent, for which over 100,000*l.* had been paid, at 40,000*l.* Of this amount

he himself held half, and his son Tom, with the widow of his friend Richardson, and Mr. Linley, each a small share. The latter was supposed to enjoy an annuity from Sheridan, which, as a matter of course, was never paid. On this basis negotiation was not difficult, for Sheridan was more or less in the power of those who had such claims on the property. He could not be considered to fare badly in receiving 20,000*l.* for his share of the patent, while 20,000*l.* more was divided among the others, and thus his connexion with Drury Lane ceased.

Such was the rather profitable conclusion of his thirty years' management of what had cost him so little.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE "O. P. RIOTS."

THE new Covent Garden Theatre was handsomely decorated in dove colour and gold. It exhibited improvements, allowed more space for each seat, and brought its galleries a few feet nearer the stage than in the old house. But the expenses had been enormous, and the proprietors found, to their great alarm, that the old system and the old prices, even if the house were full, could not save them from loss. A new system had already been tried—borrowed from the Opera-houses—of having private boxes, for which people of fashion were to give enormous rents; and Kemble and his partners determined to develop this source of profit by devoting the third circle entirely to private boxes, each of which had a little ante-room attached, the whole tier having a separate entrance and saloon of its own. As this was a novelty, and much fashionable support was promised, a revenue was expected from this source alone of not less than

12,000*l.* a year. A more doubtful step, however, was the necessary raising of the prices, which, however, was no more than that of a shilling for the boxes, and sixpence for the pit. Both steps proved to be fatal mistakes. The sudden fits of rage that seize on a theatrical audience are not always to be explained, but there were circumstances at this time that might have warned the proprietors of the indiscretion of the steps they were taking. In the Drury Lane Theatre it was true there had been a number of private boxes, but these were distributed all over the house, were on every tier, and placed next the stage. But to have a whole tier thus jealously reserved—the usual occupants driven below or aloft into the dreary and remote galleries, whence it was difficult both to see and hear, was certain to give offence, and just offence. Further, these were the days of “Liberty,” when Mr. Fox and his supporters, and “friends of the people” were in fashion, and this exclusiveness seemed utterly opposed to the popular spirit. Further there was superadded a tone of injured “morality,” which, as was long ago shown by Lord Macaulay, never fails our British public; and it was insisted that these “*un-English*” alcoves with their ante-rooms attached, were to be turned to the account of their

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private vices by a depraved aristocracy. But a greater grievance was the development of a new system of treating that vast and most useful portion of a theatrical audience—the spectators whose place was in the galleries. There had long been a tendency to encroach on their privileges. The true theory of the distribution of classes in a theatre would seem to be that all should have equal opportunities of seeing and enjoying the performance, with however different degrees of comfort. It should be analogous to the case of a railway train, where first, second, and third-class passengers are carried along at the same rate of speed, but with more or less comfortable accommodation. It is only recently that railway directors are beginning to see what valuable clients are to be found in these neglected travellers of the lowest class; and greater consideration for the galleries might open for managers an unexpected source of revenue. Now, in this new theatre, these supporters found themselves banished aloft to what were at once named “pigeon holes;”—to dark, penitential regions, where the vast crowd was huddled together, and could only peer down with difficulty through arched openings. This, I believe, was one of the chief causes of dissatisfaction; and those who attributed the riots to a radical

spirit were not so far out, as the people had every title to be offended at such an affront.

Another reason which was put forward was the wish to deprive the play-goers of their legitimate entertainment. Latterly there had been a tendency to introduce operatic singing, and the managers, finding merely dramatic attraction failing, from want of good acting and proper opportunity for acting, were casting wistful glances at the sumptuous patronage accorded to foreign singers; for the attraction of a single Italian, like Catalani, would fill one of these great houses at a small cost compared with the more expensive and less taking inducement of a large company. Their engagement of that popular singer was justly considered to be an unworthy compliance with the tastes of the august tenants of the private boxes, and was fiercely resented.

A few days before the house opened, ominous murmurs were heard about town, especially among clerks in offices, and such supporters of the theatre. Mr. Boaden reported them to Kemble, but the proprietor received the warning with a lofty smile. The newspapers, too, contained significant advertisements and paragraphs, but no idea was entertained that the town was on the eve of what was to prove

the most outrageous theatrical riot ever known in the history of theatres.

On the night of the 18th of September, 1809, the house was opened and presented a very handsome appearance, lit up with innumerable wax candles, and crowded to the very roof. The National Anthem was duly sung, and then Kemble was to speak a poetical address. But the moment he made his appearance, dressed for *Macbeth*, the storm burst, and a perfect yell of execration greeted him.

Though Kemble held comparatively but a small stake in the concern, and though Mr. Harris the elder, his partner, was known to have declared that he would sacrifice every shilling rather than give way, it is intelligible how the animosity of the mob should have chosen Kemble for its victim. His stately air of superiority—his haughty and contemptuous bearing—was an irresistible challenge to the crowd, who had also picked up the vulgar nickname "Black Jack," which Cooke was so fond of using. The play went on, but not a word could be heard; the rioters in the pit stood up with their hats on, and with their backs to the stage. It then must have flashed on the proprietors that this was no momentary dissatisfaction of the ordinary pattern, but something regularly orga-



rized, and therefore dangerous. Kemble, as the newspapers described him, used "imploring attitudes." His sister presently appeared, and at first was a little unnerved by the unmannerly noise; but both proceeded to act and went steadily through their parts to the end. The extraordinary spectacle was presented of that great play being acted by such great players, entirely in dumb-show—while at every lull the fine tones of the great actress were heard distinctly as she calmly pursued her course.

Some bold measures were now taken. Two magistrates appeared on the stage and read what was supposed to be the Riot Act. The police then came in and made some arrests. Vast crowds filled up the lobbies and passages who could not gain admittance to the house, who would not disperse, and thus increased the disorder.

At last the evening came to a close, which, however, proved to be but the inauguration of a disgraceful campaign, sustained steadily for over sixty nights. Such a spectacle could not have been witnessed in any other country, and it was unfortunately encouraged by a weakness in the administration, accompanied at the same time by a display of rashness, intemperance, and folly. For after a few nights of the same rioting,

their next step was to close the theatre, while all the books were solemnly submitted to a committee of city gentlemen, for the purpose of *proving* to a mob, who wanted nothing so little as proof or refutation of their charges, that the returns of the establishment during the last six years had been barely sufficient to provide the most slender percentage of profit. This seemed to be made out conclusively, but, as a matter of course, had not the least effect.

The discreditable proceedings that followed are well known. How every night the pit was one scene of confusion—how an "O. P." dance, accompanied with an "O. P." song, was performed—how innumerable placards and banners were exhibited—how badges were worn in hats—how Mr. Clifford, the barrister, came to be openly recognised as leader—how, at last, stung to fury by the ruin that clearly menaced them, the proprietors actually subsidized ruffians like "Dutch Sam," and other bruisers, to go into the pit and fight the crowd—and how, at last, Brandon the box-keeper arrested Clifford, and brought him before the magistrates on a charge of inciting to riot. Clifford was discharged, and brought an action for malicious imprisonment, in which he was completely victorious. This unfortunate triumph inflamed the rioters still

more.\* For nearly three months it went on steadily, and became one of the established amusements of the town. Persons of greater importance than Clifford were believed to be at work secretly.

The elaboration with which the whole was arranged is something astonishing; and even the money expended must have been a large amount. Coins and medals of excellent finish and workmanship were struck in copper and silver. One represented Kemble as a donkey, with John Bull riding him, and the motto, "From N. to O., yes, you must go!" On the other side were the popular letters "O. P.," supported by a rattle and a horn, the two emblems of the association. Another medal exhibited the letters "O. P. : O. B. : D. P. O.," with the figure of Kemble as a Jew, and the inscription, "This is the Jew that Shakspeare drew." A great artist of the grotesque, who is now alive, has given some spirited illustrations

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\* Boaden, whose Tory sympathies are displayed through all his dramatic biographies in a most amusing fashion, and one that really throws light on the politics of the time, seems to hold Sheridan and the members of the liberal party—"the people's friends"—accountable for these outrages. But it can be explained far more simply, by the ordinary motives of all theatrical rioting, and the irresistible attraction such an émeute has for a mob.

of the nightly scenes in the theatre, etched with extraordinary spirit, though he was then almost a child. The series of "O. P." caricatures are now among the rarest of Mr. GEORGE CRUIKSHANK'S works. The whole orgy is brought before us:—the theatre with its "pigeon-holes" and private boxes, every one leaning out, climbing down from one tier to another, fighting, breaking benches, winding horns, springing rattles, and flourishing the innumerable placards. A coarser, more unmitigated set of ruffians could not be conceived.

Kemble's grim and solemn face and gloomy bearing, appearing every now and again through all this confusion, offered an irresistible temptation to the satirist. The hooked nose and sorrowful whisker are always to be recognised. Now his whole life "as a stroller" was given in a broadsheet, distributed into little compartments—his whipping the top, &c. In one of the caricatures he is shown seated in private, with "Lord O'Straddle and Lord Thingumbob," each engaged with some "Phryne;" or else was exhibited in a state of drunkenness, a string of ballad rhymes following:—

"John Kemble would a-acting go,  
Heigh ho, says Kemble;

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He raised the price, which he thought too low,  
Whether the public would let him or no,  
With his rowly-powly, gammon and spinach,  
And ho ! says Manager Kemble !”

Now he was shown striking an attitude in *Macbeth*, and uttering the speech “Is this a dagger,” &c., while a monstrous spectral rattle floated in the air before him. In all these his classical features were exaggerated into a most repulsive physiognomy, in harmony with the sobriquet “Black Jack.” The favourite shape of ridicule was the gathering all the members of the family, the De Camps and the rest, into one group.\* Under these insults Kemble behaved with a stolid calmness and courage, was ever at his post, ready to come forward and face the infuriated crowd who outraged him in every possible way. Now they affronted him with a cartoon under which was written “Mr. Kemble’s head *itches*,” alluding to his favourite and eccentric pronunciation ; now affecting to be insulted themselves when he came

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\* All these early works of Mr. Cruikshank have been exceedingly rare, and are every year being sent out of the country to America and the colonies. Indeed, all theatrical biographies, which make a most entertaining department of light literature, are being diligently collected and sent out to the New World. Libraries are being formed with great diligence and at a great cost. Theatrical memoirs have doubled in price within half a dozen years.

out calmly to ask them "what they wanted?" instead of demanding with conventional courtesy "what was their pleasure?" At last they went so far as to organize a party to attack his house; but due precautions were taken to frustrate this dastardly attempt. The terror in which his family lived during the conflict may be conceived from a letter which his sister wrote to a friend about this time:—

"My appearance of illness was occasioned entirely by an agitating visit that morning from poor Mr. John Kemble, on account of the giving up of the private boxes, which I fear must be at last complied with. Surely nothing ever equalled the domineering of the mob in these days. It is to me inconceivable how the public at large submits to be thus dictated to, against their better judgment, by a handful of imperious and intoxicated men. In the meantime, what can the poor proprietors do but yield to overwhelming necessity?"

"Could I once feel that my poor brother's anxiety about the theatre was at an end, I should be, marvellous to say, as well as I ever was in my life. But only conceive what a state he must have been in, however good a face he might put upon the business, for upwards of three months; and think what his

poor wife and I must have suffered, when, for weeks together, such were the outrages committed on his house and otherwise, that I trembled for even his personal safety: she, poor soul, living with ladders at her windows, in order to make her escape through the garden in case of an attack. Mrs. Kemble tells me his nerves are much shaken. What a time it has been with us all; beginning with fire, and continued with fury! Yet sweet sometimes are the uses of adversity. They not only strengthen family affection, but teach us all to walk humbly with our God. Yours, S. S."

Yet if there was outrageous violence on one side, there was a lamentable want of sense and discretion on the other. When it was determined to meet violence with violence, it had been wise to make such repression effectual. Amid all this hurly-burly, however, it is refreshing to hear the voice of so shrewd and sensible a moderator as William Cobbett. He said truly that the ground of quarrel had gradually changed its aspect, and that the original grievance had given place to others. The rioters had now some reason on their side, for "O. P." now meant no hired bruisers, no fire engines, no legal prosecutions. He rebuked the vulgar cry so often heard of calling



Kemble and his sister "upstarts"—those great artists who had been before them so many years. He said the original proceedings of the rioters were opposed to ordinary commercial rules, and amounted to "an attempt to *compel people to sell entertainment at the price pointed out by the purchasers.*" This plain and practical view was very near the truth. I say very near, because he did not give full force to the objection that the theatres, by their patents and established position, had almost a monopoly of the theatrical amusements of the town. In conclusion, he advised terms of conciliation which were nearly the same as those which were ultimately agreed on.

After the result of the trial, Kemble feeling that he was not called upon to carry on the struggle on the mere ground of principle, determined to yield. It was a humiliating position in which to find himself; for he was fighting the battle of common peace and decency, and it was the plain duty of the government of the city to restore order. It was a monstrous thing that such a duty should have been cast upon the proprietors of the theatre. What was in truth a regular *conspiracy*, as the judges laid it down, should have been dealt with criminally and at all risks. There was, of course, the immense difficulty

of legal proof in the way ; but if vigorous action had been taken, and, say, a large reward offered by the authorities for substantial evidence—or, indeed, if some open support had been given to him, the riots could have been suppressed. This was withheld, and he at once entered into negotiations.

An “O. P.” dinner was given at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, at which Mr. Clifford, “the honest barrister,” as he was called, was in the chair. This gentleman has been described in very opprobrious terms, owing no doubt to the excited passions of the time ; but there is no doubt that he was a man of good character, who believed that a constitutional question was involved in the matter, and whose alliance with the mob was confirmed by the illegal proceedings to which he himself had been subjected. During the dinner Kemble was introduced, and a formal treaty signed, of which the provisions were that the private boxes should be reduced to six, that is, to their old legitimate form of stage boxes ; that the old pit prices should be restored, but that the new box prices should remain ; that an apology should be made, and the offending Brandon should be dismissed. Kemble passed from the meeting to the stage, and in an humble speech announced the arrangement that

had just been concluded. An attempt was made to save the poor box-keeper, who had only too faithfully performed his duty, by leading him out to make his excuses; but his life was imperilled from the shower of sticks and missiles flung at him. The other proprietor, Mr. Harris, then came to plead for him, saying he was an old and trusty servant of the house. But he would not be listened to. On the following night the riots were beginning afresh, when Kemble had to present himself and announce submission to this final demand.

This caused a lull for a short time. But there was a part of the treaty yet to be performed, and the most humiliating part. Fresh tumults brought out Kemble once more. "I understand, gentlemen," he said, "that your displeasure now arises from the fact that an apology has not been made for the introduction of improper persons to this theatre. I ask your pardon for not having made it sooner; and I now, in my own name, and on the part of the other proprietors, most humbly apologize for the same. We are very sorry for what has passed, and beg leave to assure you that inclination and duty will alike render it our first pride, for the time to come, to prevent anything of the kind from occurring again." No further self-

abasement could, even unreasonably, be demanded. A great placard was hoisted from the pit with the words "We are satisfied ;" and amid shouts of triumph repeated many times during the evening, the great "O. P." riot—or at least two acts out of the three—came to a close.

This was an evil omen under which to start a new undertaking, and a disastrous defeat of the kind was not encouraging for dramatic prospects. Kemble, however, with such heart as he could, devoted himself to the study of some new Roman characters, and in the austere *Cato* and *Brutus* was to prove very effective ; but the day for producing entrancing results was gone, ever since the huge "Dom-Daniel" had been reared, and the agitation of the riots would take long before it solidly subsided.

In his contest with the rioters, though Kemble had shown unflinching spirit, there had certainly been a want of skilful management. After holding out so long as three months, it might have been worth while holding out yet longer ; or if it had been resolved to yield and make submission, the submission ought to have come earlier. A straightforward line ought to have been taken, and taken promptly, and, above all,

when any engagement was entered into, or concession made, it should have been largely construed and loyally adhered to. When the next season began, which was in September, 1810, almost as soon as the audience had looked round the house on the opening night, it was discovered that no less than eight boxes had been retained in addition to the six conceded by the contract, making a total of fourteen. This was a foolish as well as a gross breach of faith. It was at once detected, and all the rioting broke out afresh. Kemble presently appeared, and affecting to mistake the cause of their displeasure, apologized for some boxes near the roof being closed up, which, he said, was done "to improve the ventilation;" they should be opened at once. He was greeted with the old execration, and with the not unnatural cry, "*No shuffling!*" Kemble did not appear again. A general riot ensued. Sticks were produced, orations delivered from the boxes, and the disorderly looked forward with delight to a renewal of their Saturnalia. On the next night the old "O. P." incidents were all revived, and with incredible stupidity, the managers justified the violation of the agreement by reference to an Act of Parliament passed for the other theatre, and by which some kind of legal sanction was given

to private boxes. They urged that thus an unfair advantage was given to the other house. Not a word of excuse would be listened to, and justly. Placards were distributed among the audience with such inscriptions as these:—"O. P.—We have been imposed upon;" "O. P.—The treaty is broken; open war!" and doggrel verses were passed from hand to hand. The following are some of these effusions:—

"John Kemble alone is the cause of this riot;  
When he lowers his prices John Bull will be quiet."

Pictures of Kemble hanging from a gibbet were also exhibited, with the motto, "No faith with heretics." There was also a parody on the familiar "House that Jack Built":—

"This is the manager full of scorn, who raised the prices to the people forlorn, and directed the thief-taker shaven and shorn, to take up John Bull with his bugle-horn, who hissed the CAT engaged to squall, to the poor in the pigeon-holes over the Boxes, let to the great that visit the House that JACK built."

"Six private Boxes  
To these crafty old Foxes  
By contract were to remain:  
Jack Kemble had best  
Give up all the rest,  
Or his six he will not retain."

Indeed, the "O. P." literature is very considerable in bulk, and there was a shower of caricatures.\*

Another favourite ground of attack was the strong "family party" engaged at one house. One handbill was headed, "The Necessity of Advance in Prices":—

Salary of Mr. Kemble . . .	£6000	}	£7000
Benefit of do. . . .	1000		
Salary of Mr. and Mrs. C. Kemble . . .	5000		
Two Benefits . . . . .	2000		
Salary of Mrs. Siddons . . . . .	3675		
Benefit of do. . . . .	1000		
Salary of Mme. Catalani . . . . .	4200		
Two Benefits . . . . .	2000		
	—		£25,175

Kemble vainly endeavoured to go on with his part of Penruddock, but was interrupted at every speech with an ingenious perversion. Thus at the duel scene was called out, "Shoot him, Johnny Raw, if he don't keep his word." When an actor spoke of "Your little comforts; it is right you should have them," there were shouts of uproarious laughter. The old outrageous disorder then followed. A gentleman climbed down from the boxes into the pit, and the "O. P." song and dance were duly performed. At last,

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\* Williams, the well-known "Anthony Pasquin," has given the fullest account of these famous riots.



about the fourth act, Kemble came forward and demanded their pleasure, which was explained to him in a vigorous and telling speech by an orator in the boxes. He was informed that he must keep to his agreement, or reduce the box price to the old six shillings. This ultimatum was saluted with a flourish of horns, trumpets, and rattles. Kemble's supporters in the boxes, who were many, were driven out with showers of apples and other missiles, and to the cry of "*Contractors out—two and two!*" and with "*Groans for Black Jack!*" the performance ended. This, of course, was too menacing a state of things to be allowed to go further. It was promptly announced that the managers would give way; the obnoxious boxes were abolished, and peace was finally restored.\* Thus ended the great riots known as "O. P."

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\* All these changes were attended with enormous expense; and it was wonderful how the theatre supported these ruinous losses.

## CHAPTER IX.

## DECAY OF COVENT GARDEN.

THE “enlightened” management which immediately followed, and which allowed their new stage to echo to the hoofs of circus horses and performing animals, with vulgar displays and processions, had a commercial justification in the late disastrous events. By this time too it had been discovered that the difficulty of seeing and hearing in so vast a theatre was diminishing the attraction: the crowd was not inclined to pay a shilling or two shillings to enjoy a faint and distant view of some tiny figures—to hear speeches, indeed, but to miss all the by play and mobility of feature which is the great charm of “seeing a play.” Old actors like King had come off the stage cursing the great houses whose huge “voûte” obliged them to strain and roar and grimace. This might be a reasonable commercial excuse for a change in the class of entertainment; but we may lament that so classical an actor as

Kemble should have thrown himself so heartily into the business. Like Garrick, he was "thorough" in any change he undertook, and it must be said had more justification in the reason just given, than Garrick had for his shows and pantomimes. Garrick was sole *contrôleur*; Kemble's interest was well represented by a sixth only.

And when we look back to this era, and think of the extravagances displayed to entice a British audience within the theatres; how "the dog Carlo," the leading player in "The Caravan" filled the house night after night; how "infant prodigies" like Master Betty and Miss Mudie were put forward; how pantomimes like *Mother Goose* delighted the town; how ranting melodramas like *Pizarro* were followed, and how finally, as will be seen, horses, hounds, and wild beasts were introduced—we must own that Kemble, a pillar of the stage, was all through more or less connected with this degradation! How as has recently sunk the English stage—for there are signs of amendment visible—it may be questioned if its condition was ever lower than at this disastrous period, when Garrick had been dead but a few years, and the great names of Kemble and Siddons were adorning the stage. He was no doubt helpless to a

certain degree; but it is unfortunate for him that his name should be connected with such an era.

In the month of February, 1811,\* the whole town was rushing to see another of these extravaganzas, *Blue Beard*, which had been revived with great magnificence, for which a whole circus troupe had been engaged. Splendid dresses, elaborate conflicts on horseback, in which the "highly trained animals" simulated all the agonies of death, with the capture of towns, were spectacles that filled the theatres for many a night. But the managers were justly pursued with ridicule, much of which fell, as of course, upon Kemble. The jesters invented scenes between him and postulants for the stage—amusing *mal-entendus*, in which the manager was exhibited as taking their proposals as referring to "a barb," instead of to a gay actress. An imaginary list of rules was drawn up to regulate the behaviour of

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\* The excitement caused by this dog was inconceivable. He made his appearance at Drury Lane, and was one of those lucky hits that now and again propped the tottering fortunes of Sheridan's house. After success had been assured, and the Newfoundland dog's plunge had excited the most uproarious enthusiasm, Sheridan came rushing in behind the scenes asking "for his preserver." The gratified author of the piece tells us he at once presented himself. "Not you," said Sheridan, bluntly, "but *the Dog*."

four-footed performers behind the scenes, which referred to a recent dispute on forfeits between the manager and players. "Every mare or horse," it ran, "who refuses a part shall forfeit *one peck of oats*. Should any horse, mare, or gelding come to rehearsal in dirty shoes, or lie down in the green-room, he shall forfeit one peck. For snorting during rehearsal, one peck."

A pleasant scene was described by the author of "The Dramatic Censor," in reference to the further extravagance of a representation of a fox-hunt given on the boards of Covent Garden, and which probably did occur. The veteran Cumberland was reading a play in the green-room, when a chorus of yelping and snarling broke out from below the floor. "My God!" said the amazed dramatist, "what is that?" He was told it was the fox-hounds, who were kennelled under the green-room, and who were to be introduced into the new piece. "How, sir! And has it come to this?" A property-man had just passed by with a large piece of beef, which had been scented by the dogs.

This degradation was commented on in many quarters; and while the Drury Lane Bill was before the House, a member called attention to the monopoly of the patent theatres, and asked, reasonably enough, was

it for the encouragement of four-legged actors that it was to be sustained, while so many human actors were excluded, "by Mr. Kemble's jealousy," from the boards. Many excellent artists, a Mr. Marryat urged, could not get engagements, "being thrown out of work *by the quadrupeds*, whose services could be obtained at a far cheaper rate, and who act in the largest theatre, *as there was no necessity for watching their expressive countenances.*" Sheridan made a lively and spirited defence, which quite disposed of the insinuation that he had helped to encourage the late riots, and said Mr. Kemble would far prefer performing "on his own *two legs*," but that the fault lay with the public. When legitimate performances were given the houses were deserted. Indeed, the theatrical speeches in the House of Commons during this time, and these were many, are highly entertaining; and though the subjects of monopoly, &c., and the old acts of George II. have been since brought forward, and received a large share of attention—though committees have sat, and reports been made, it is discreditable that the whole question should remain in the unsettled and unsatisfactory condition it does at present.

## CHAPTER X.

## MRS. SIDDONS RETIRES.

**B**UT by this time the great actress had begun to look forward to a retreat from the stage ; and, indeed, by this time it is easy to see that interest in her stage-life is nearly exhausted. She herself was taking away as it were from it its artistic tone, for she was professedly labouring to make up a certain sum before she withdrew, and to this end she drudged on and toiled with an amazing steadiness and persistence.\* She had long since, as we have seen, secured the ten thousand pounds which had been the first

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\* Mr. Robertson, the Secretary of Covent Garden Theatre, gave Campbell the following note respecting the terms of her engagements at that house :—

Of the amount of her salary in 1803 there is no document ; but in 1804 and 5, it was 20*l.* per night.

In 1805–6, she acted on an average of 27*l.* per night.

In 1806–7, she received 30 guineas per night.

In 1810–11, 30 guineas per night ; and in 1811–12, 50 guineas per night.



goal at which she intended halting. She had by this time more than doubled that sum. But still, after nearly thirty years' labour, it was not very much to have put by. Some of her savings, however, had been lost in Mr. Siddons's speculations, and some more was swallowed up in Sheridan's bankruptcy. And yet it was very soon, according to theatrical canons, to think of departing. She was not yet fifty years old, and an actress of less force of character might have worked on for another ten years at the least,\* exhibiting that most humiliating of all spectacles, the

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\* In a charming prologue, written for her benefit by no less "elegant" a hand than Mr. Rogers, but which cannot compare with Scott's Edinburgh piece, written for Kemble, she appeals pathetically and gracefully to her long connexion with the stage, and the almost unceasing favours of her admirers:—

" But she whose first best wish is your applause,  
Herself exemplifies the truth she draws.  
Born on the stage, through every shifting scene,  
Obscure or bright, tempestuous or serene,  
Still has your smile her trembling spirit fired,  
And can she act, with thoughts like these inspired?  
Thus from her mind all artifice she flings,  
All skill, all practice, now unmeaning things.  
To you, unchecked, each genuine feeling flows,  
For all that life endears, to you she owes."

Kemble and his sister were most fortunate in having poets like Scott, Campbell, and Rogers to address the public for them.

decayed player of enfeebled powers. And yet one might be inclined to think that it was more a longing for retirement, a weariness, a wish for the quiet of her cottage, for the companionship of her children and friends, than any immediate sense of the thought—

“ Superfluous lags the veteran on the stage.”

She was getting significant warnings to withdraw in the shape of growing physical weakness, which should not be exhibited to an audience. Thus, when she knelt to the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, two attendants had to come forward to help her to rise ; and, to save appearances, the awkward shift was resorted to of making the same ceremonial attend on the rising up of a younger actress who did not need such support. It was also remarked that she did not play parts like Isabella and Belvidera with the old spirit and *abandon*, and people saw that this was owing to the stiffness of age, which prevented the free animation of her limbs. At her age, too, she could not be secure a moment against a violent and mortifying dethronement, and she only escaped that trial by a very short interval. One of the most lively and agreeable women of her generation, the mother of the present Archbishop Trench, who had been an

enthusiastic admirer, had already noted that her Isabella was less various than it used to be; that she, as it were, so piled up the agony as to make it monotonous, and, as Mr. Tighe said, did not keep any of her guns in reserve, but fired them all off at once. It might have been also remarked that the change which was taking place in the powers of brother and sister as they advanced in life was in each of a different character. It almost seemed as though his study and training were bearing fruit, and that with every year he was improving. There could at least be no doubt as to the strength of *his* attraction, and "600*l.* houses," in the year before his retirement, were an average tribute to his performances. His sister's playing was certainly not so attractive. The force of genius had brought her success at once and in a torrent, as it were; gifts less grand, as his were, were to make their impression more slowly. His success was to culminate, hers to diminish, towards the close of life. A reasonable explanation is to be found in the difference of sex—a woman showing physical infirmity so much more than a man of the same age; and the spectacle of a stout, elderly lady playing Isabella, which was what she presented, with the fiercest tragic effect, could scarcely bring

enjoyment, even to the most æsthetic. Though there was only two years' difference in age between them, she was physically ten years older than her brother, and she was to be the first to withdraw.

She was very weary indeed. "If Mr. —— thinks himself unfortunate, let him look on me and be silent," she wrote sorrowfully to a friend. She now began to prepare for retirement, and entered on a round of her best characters—Lady Macbeth, Mrs. Beverley, Constance, Elvira, Euphrasia, Queen Katherine, the two Isabellas, Belvidera, Hermione, Volumina, and Mrs. Haller. She contemplated the parting from the stage with something like dread, and it was strange that she should have used to Mr. Piozzi, in reference to this matter, almost the same expression that Garrick did. "I feel," she said, "as if I were mounting the first steps of a ladder conducting me to the other world." He had said it seemed as if the parting of soul and body were before him.

Her stoutness, and bulkiness of person was indeed a serious drawback to the effect of her playing, and it may be suspected that if this blemish had been absent she would have remained some time longer on the stage. In the portraits by Lawrence and others this imperfection is softened down after the compli-

mentary fashion usual in portraits. But there is an almost too faithful record in existence of her appearance, both at this time and a few years earlier—a compliment to a player which is perhaps unique. When she was in Dublin she had made the acquaintance of some clever ladies, daughters of Mrs. Sackville Hamilton, a name well known in Irish society. These young girls seem to have followed the actress with a sort of adoration, and one of them, who was a good artist, filled a large folio volume with elaborate water-colour sketches of the great performer. These represented, not only her best and most striking attitudes in the various situations of the play, but all her different changes of dress. Even the costumes she appeared in at private parties are given. But though the attitudes are remarkable and graceful, this stoutness and almost corpulence leave a grotesque effect, and it interferes with even her most tragic *poses*.\* At last her withdrawal was announced. It seems to have been badly *exploité'd*, or the public were apathetic. It was not heralded in the usual ex-

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\* This singular volume, which contains some fifty or sixty water-colour sketches, is in the possession of my friend Mr. Richard Bennett of Kingstown. When we are considering Mrs. Siddons's acting it will furnish much assistance.

citing fashion, when a fine actor is about to close his career.

The 29th of June, 1812, was fixed for her last appearance, and, as may be imagined, Lady Macbeth was the appropriate character. It was an exciting scene; the theatre was crammed to overflowing; the applause and sympathy were almost tumultuous. The excitement took an almost unprecedented shape, and when the "sleep-walking scene," as it was called, was concluded, the audience stood upon the benches and insisted on the play ending there. The complimentary wish was gratified, and the curtain was let down. This was a favourite custom in Dublin, in the instance of great players, even on ordinary nights; and on this occasion there were many who complained of it and were dissatisfied. When the curtain next rose the great actress was discovered dressed in white, and seated at a table. She came forward to receive an impassioned greeting, and, with emotion, delivered the following address, written for her by her nephew, Mr. Horace Twiss:—

Who has not felt how growing use endears  
The fond remembrance of our former years?  
Who has not sigh'd, when doom'd to leave at last  
The hopes of youth, the habits of the past,

Ten thousand ties and interests, that impart  
A second nature to the human heart,  
And wreathing round it close, like tendrils, climb,  
Blooming in age, and sanctified by time!

Yes! at this moment crowd upon my mind  
Scenes of bright days for ever left behind,  
Bewildering visions of enraptured youth,  
When hope and fancy wore the hues of truth,  
And long-forgotten years, that almost seem  
The faded traces of a morning dream!  
Sweet are those mournful thoughts: for they renew  
The pleasing sense of all I owe to you,  
For each inspiring smile, and soothing tear—  
For those full honours of my long career,  
That cheer'd my earliest hope, and chased my latest fear!

And though for me those tears shall flow no more,  
And the warm sunshine of your smile is o'er,—  
Though the bright beams are fading fast away  
That shone unclouded through my summer day,—  
Yet grateful Memory shall reflect their light  
O'er the dim shadows of the coming night,  
And lend to later life a softer tone,  
A moonlight tint—a lustre of her own.

Judges and Friends! to whom the magic strain  
Of nature's feeling never spoke in vain,  
Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,  
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,  
May think on her whose lips have pour'd so long  
The charmed sorrows of your Shakspeare's song:—  
On her, who parting to return no more,  
Is now the mourner she but *seem'd* before,—  
Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,  
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last Farewell!



She was much agitated ; and at the conclusion her brother John came forward to lead her away. Then the curtain descended slowly, and shut her out from what, after all, must be one of the most seductive and entrancing worlds, compared with which, all the placid enjoyments of well-earned rest and retirement must seem tame and insipid. But for one like her, who commanded applause, and secured perhaps the highest appreciation ever awarded to an actress, it must have been almost like a foretaste of death.

In this way, close on sixty years ago, the English stage lost its greatest actress. Whatever stars may be destined to rise, it is almost certain that none will be admitted to be her equal.

After the retirement of his sister, Kemble withdrew for a time from the stage, and devoted the interval to rest and to paying a round of visits to his friends in England and Ireland. Infirmities were coming upon him, chiefly in the shape of gout, which racked him with more than its usual agonies. These pains he tried to allay with opium pills and a French quack medicine then in high fashion. Often he was found groaning in torture in the green-room and had to be assisted to the wing ; but once on the stage his fortitude was amazing, and no one could have guessed

how much he was suffering. These were warnings to retire. But there was another, perhaps even more disagreeable, though it had been delayed longer than might have been expected—namely, the uprising of a rival. From Cooke, as we have seen, no serious opposition was to be feared; the incurable vices, the grossness of his disrespect to the audience, at last brought even his great talents into contempt. But with the rising of the new theatre from its ashes rose also a genius of the first magnitude, dangerous because gifted with colour, fire, a rude and splendid power, and a new style. Edmund Kean had made his appearance; the town was rushing to see him, and comparison was unavoidable. People were astonished and entranced. The comparison *was* made at every performance; here was novelty, force, and electric fire; they knew Kemble's cultivated elocution by heart, and had listened to it some thirty years now. The way in which men like Byron and Hazlitt were affected by Kean, the warmth and extravagance of their admiration, show us the deep impression that he had made. The new genius had come, and there were many who not only compared him with, but placed him far above, the old actor. This was mortifying. All that was left to Kemble, after seeing him,

was to say : "Our styles of acting are so totally different that you must not expect me to like that of Mr. Kean ; but one thing I must say *in his favour*, he is at all times terribly in earnest." A fair and reasonable criticism, though too cold ; Kemble was himself always in earnest, though not "terribly," against which excess careful study and elaboration was a safeguard. A rival to his sister too had nearly started up, and had Mrs. Siddons delayed her retirement a little she would have had to encounter the same mortification through the coming of Miss O'Neil. There was not the same risk, nor indeed any, for the older actress as there was for Kemble ; but Mrs. Siddons owned that the public enjoyed mortifying her by affecting to prefer a new favourite. Kemble, however, was presently to act with her, and she virtually took Mrs. Siddons's place. But though Kean must be considered inferior, yet, as Dr. Doran says, "his coming shook the Kemble school to fragments." The reign of laborious elaboration had been prolonged a little too long ; and there was now a reaction setting in. There were dangers too from another quarter. Young, also a remarkable actor, was attracting notice, and when he played Cassius to Kemble's Brutus, in 1812, it was openly

declared that a greater actor than Kemble, now beginning to decay both in health and freshness, was before them. The same remark was made ten years later, when Young played Iago to Kean's Othello. And yet such a conclusion might seem to be fallacious, and is indeed only based upon the theatrical anarchy that prevails on the English stage, where every actor tries to lead, not in a line of parts, but in tragedy or comedy. Young was a magnificent Iago or Cassius, but it did not therefore follow that he should be a finer Othello or Brutus. But still, that such things should be merely said, must be so many stabs for the decaying great player.\*

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\* Mr. Charles Dickens used to tell a little story which illustrates what I have just stated. He was much struck, in a provincial town, by the admirable, almost perfect, playing of an actor who filled some obscure part, such as a captain of the guard. He offered to get him a London engagement, and succeeded in doing so. It was however declined, on the plea that leading characters, like *Hamlet*, were not to be given to him.

## CHAPTER XI.

## REVIEW OF MRS. SIDDONS'S CHARACTERS.

IN this place it may be found convenient to enter on an examination of the great gifts which have given Mrs. Siddons so high a place among the great players. It has indeed often been lamented that the glories of actor or actress are as fleeting and irrecoverable for a later generation, as those of a beautiful flower or a charming song; but it is possible to collect those more marked points in her delineations which made so deep an impression on her hearers. Even these convey but a faint idea of the great powers of a great actress, while even to give an imperfect description of the effect produced on an audience requires a dramatic instinct in the reporter of no mean order. By comparing the notes of a great many observers some sort of picture may be restored, which may be of service at least to the players of our own time.

The first question to be considered in measuring

Mrs. Siddons's genius, is what place she is to hold among English actresses. As to this point there can be no dispute. It is, of course, almost impossible to compare the players of different generations, but there are a few tests which can be applied: the degree of enthusiasm excited, the descriptions left to us, imperfect as they are, and the style of effect at which they aimed. Later artists too can always be more advantageously judged than those who have gone before, for the earlier ones have few standards to be compared with. But in the instance of female tragedians the English stage had been signally poor, and Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Crawford, and Mrs. Yates seem the leading names that rise to the memory. The notices of Mrs. Porter's excellence are singularly indistinct. Mrs. Cibber was a "sweet and tender" actress; Mrs. Crawford a "powerful" and effective actress, but conventional; while Mrs. Pritchard alone remains, with whom, for a time at least, her contemporaries were fond of comparing Mrs. Siddons, though it is confessed that Mrs. Pritchard never produced that electrical and overwhelming shock that Mrs. Siddons did. She also divided her powers, and was distinguished in comedy, and, above all, she was nothing of an artist. She trusted to the "raw"

impulse of the moment. According to the well-known anecdote, she had never cared to read the portion of *Macbeth* that followed after she had left the stage, though "vulgar idiot," as Dr. Johnson called her, seemed too strong a phrase.

Mrs. Yates, as regards physique and haughty majesty, was often compared in certain characters with the great actress. She had a fine voice and haughty features, and in "tempestuous" parts was truly effective. But still it is evident she did not rise above a certain level; she also was too diffused, and excelled too much in comedy to have that terrible concentration which is necessary to the finest order of tragedy. On the whole, allowing the widest margin for partiality for the newest comers, Mrs. Siddons may fairly be admitted to be the queen of the British stage.

A further consideration, and one no less interesting, is what place we are to give her among the great actresses of the world. It is almost impossible to discuss her claims fairly with those of foreign actresses like Dumesnil or Clairon, the descriptions of whose powers are given after a very meagre fashion. It might seem a question to be more easily determined whether she or Rachel was the greatest actress.



Here it may be imagined that there was about the same relation between them as existed between Kemble and Kean, as regards at least the *quality* of their gifts. Rachel would seem to have possessed more of that brilliant dramatic force—that fierce native power—that savage and unregulated passion, which at once went home, and which, in both Kean and Rachel, was very much akin. A great deal too must be allowed for difference of national character, and that element of careful study which was so remarkable in Mrs. Siddons, and on which she rested a little too much in her later years. The difference too of the plays, in which each made her great effects must be considered, Shakspeare containing *so much more that study and deliberation* could bring to the surface, than any French dramatist like Racine or Corneille. On the whole, and subject to the difficulty of deciding in such case, one would be inclined to say that Mrs. Siddons was the greatest artist, that is, her powers were more complete, more finished, more spread in various directions, while in particular points Rachel's were concentrated, and perhaps more thoroughly effective.

That her two brothers could not be compared with her in gifts and power there can be no ques-

tion. That surpassing tenderness, that heartrending piteousness of grief, which produced such marvellous effect in her earlier years, was wanting in John Kemble's acting. With him it became deepened into a gloomy despair. It is highly characteristic that Charles Kemble should have thought that his brother John was the finer player of the two.\* That pretty nearly the same opinion was in John Kemble's own breast would appear probable from the fact that he was fond of giving her directions and instructions, which she always accepted with great humility, and followed out strictly. But she confessed to Mr. Sharpe that these were opposed to her own judgment, and was inclined to believe that they interfered with the due effect of her characters. Nothing is more likely. But the fact that he should have attempted to direct one whose genius was so admittedly greater than his own, fairly gives rise to the presumption that she felt that he had greater powers. It is not too much to say that her powers were as much above his as his were above those of his brother Charles.

Mrs. Siddons's characters, like those of her brother John, might be divided into two broad classes, the

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\* So he told the late Mr. Crabb Robinson.

first, those in which she overwhelmed her hearers with the grandeur and majesty of her impersonations; the second, where she excited, pleased, and interested them. Ardent admirers would have included a third class of parts like *Rosalind and Portia*, but the greatest indulgence can only pronounce her comedy mediocre, or, at most, intelligent. Her great height, her classical shape of countenance, her associations, all connected with the deepest tragedy, gave a solemn weight to such parts, which an affected gaiety only intensified.\* But a more accurate division of her tragic characters might be made into four classes. First, should be placed those of Shakspearian grandeur and dignity, like *Lady Macbeth*; secondly, those in which a classical dignity was combined with the modern shapes of emotion, as in the *Grecian Daughter* or *Jane Shore*; thirdly, purely melodramatic characters like *Mrs. Haller*; and fourthly, characters of dignified Shakspearian comedy, like *Hermione*. In each of these distinct departments one or two characters could be named in which she was remarkable—a singular and exceptional proof of genius.

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\* At the same time it will be seen that high claims to merit were put forward by such good judges as Godwin for her comedy.

At the head of these performances of the first class may be placed her Lady Macbeth, Queen Katherine, Constance, and Volumnia. It has been shown how she found her way by degrees to these great characters; how, after ranging the whole gamut of the passions in *Isabella* and such pieces, she could find the satisfactory exercise and development of her great gifts in the grand Shakspearian drama. And this is a fresh homage to his works. These characters suited the grandeur which almost breathed from every motion of hers: in these there was a broadness which gave a never-ceasing variety to her playing. But of all her characters Lady Macbeth must be placed first. The view she professed to take of the character, carefully elaborated by study, was of a tender, beautiful, interesting lady, who possessed her husband's love, who was urged on by ambition, and who, after the deed was done, was filled with about as much remorse as he was. Now this, though an ingenious theory, and cleverly supported by an elaborate essay, seems a false refinement, and would not be received by Shakspearian students. It might be wondered at, then, how, with such mistaken colouring, she made the part so effective. But the truth is, though she wrote an elaborate essay in support of

her theory, we cannot find that she carried it into practice, and in the many descriptions of her acting it does not seem to have attracted attention. It was her grandeur and terrible purpose that impressed itself on all beholders, and that tenderness and affection, if at all attempted, was lost upon the audience.

Mr. Boaden, who saw her often, noticed many of her "points." Almost at her first entrance was perceived the unscrupulous resolution of her soul, even in her face and bearing. At the passage in the letter about the Witches: "They made themselves air," there was a little suspension of her voice—"themselves—*air*"—which seemed to convey, not astonishment at such a prodigy, but a satisfaction at finding they had such real power. When she had finished there was a pause of reflection. Then she went on: "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and *shalt be*, what thou art promised," and the burst of energy on the words "shalt be" was so tremendous it seemed to convey the whole story, character, and moral of the play. This was her art, for the "point" is an obvious one. But she, it was remarked, had this wonderful power of "filling the stage," conveying by look, insinuation, and a mysterious force, a world of associations and

ideas, where an ordinary player could do no more, as in the present instance, than make a mere energetic assertion. In the midst of her reverie on the great future she is planning for her husband, the Messenger announces the coming of King Duncan, when she exclaimed, "Thou'rt mad to say it," on which she checked herself, and, in a lower voice, explained herself. When she invoked the destroyers, in their "sightless substances," her figure, the raised shoulders, the hands hollowed, the distended eyes straining at vacancy, left a terrible impression. Her reception of Duncan was that of a gracious and respectful hostess, with no attempt at the more vulgar taking the audience into confidence, and exulting over what was to come. When she tries to rouse Macbeth with the assurance of what *she* would do to her "babe," how she would "dash the brains out," she wrote in her essay that it was ambition that had made her thus savage, and that underneath there was still the original mother's affectionate nature. This was again a mere refinement, and, as she did not convey it in her acting, it seems superfluous. "There was here," says Mr. Boaden, "no qualifying with mercy, or humanity *in tone or gesture*;" she seemed then, "a fiend-like woman." What is vulgarly called "the dagger

scene" is best explained in her own words:—"In the tremendous suspense of these moments, while she recollects her habitual humanity, one trait of tender feeling is expressed, 'Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it.' Her humanity vanishes, however, in the same instant; for when she observes that Macbeth, in the terror and confusion of his faculties, has brought the daggers from the place where they had agreed they should remain for the crimination of the grooms, she exhorts him to return with them to that place, and to smear those attendants of the Sovereign with blood. He, shuddering, exclaims, 'I'll go no more! I am afraid to think of what I have done. Look on't again I dare not.'

"Then instantaneously the solitary particle of her human feeling is swallowed up in her remorseless ambition, and, wrenching the daggers from the feeble grasp of her husband, she finishes the act which the infirm of purpose had not courage to complete, and calmly and steadily returns to her accomplice with the fiend-like boast—

" 'My hands are of your colour;  
But I would scorn to wear a heart so white.'

"A knocking at the gate interrupts this terrific



dialogue; and all that now occupies her mind is urging him to wash his hands and put on his night-gown, '*lest occasion call,*' says she, '*and show us to be the watchers.*' In a deplorable depravation of all rational knowledge, and loss to every recollection except that of his enormous guilt, she hurries him away to their own chamber."

When Mr. Boaden witnessed the scene, the seven first rows of the pit were crowded with ladies and gentlemen of the first fashion. And her "Give me the daggers" excited a general start and flutter among them. Upon her return from the room, in the third act, she says, she always tried to convey "a dejection of countenance and manner," that she is no longer the determined creature she was before the murder, and she always assumed a sort of sympathetic tenderness for her husband. Her acting during the Banquet scene has often been commended for its elaboration of contradictory passion. But it was founded on the traditional playing of Mrs. Pritchard. "She smiled on one" (of the guests) says Davies, "whispered to another, and distinctly saluted a third; in short, she practised every possible artifice to hide the transaction between her husband and the vision his disturbed imagination had raised. Her reproving

and angry looks which glanced towards Macbeth at the same time, were mixed with marks of inward vexation." This would seem almost too artificial and bustling, and a greater actress might convey the same idea without this multiplicity of emotions—which too, would seem opposed to the fearless and contemptuous character of the woman. Mrs. Siddons, however, seems, if anything, to have developed the "business."

"Dying with fear," she writes, "yet assuming the utmost composure, she returns to her stately canopy; and, with trembling nerves, having tottered up the steps to her throne, that bad eminence, she entertains her wondering guests with frightful smiles, with over-acted attention, and with fitful graciousness, painfully, yet incessantly labouring to divert their attention from her husband. Whilst writhing thus under her internal agonies, her restless and terrifying glances towards Macbeth, in spite of all her efforts to suppress them, have thrown the whole table into amazement; and the murderer then suddenly breaks up the assembly, by the following confession of his horrors :

" ' Can such things be,  
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,  
Without our special wonder ? You make me strange

Even to the disposition that I owe,  
When now I think you can behold such sights  
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,  
When mine are blanched with fear.'

ROSSE.

'What sights, my lord?'

"What imitation, in such circumstances as these, would ever satisfy the demands of expectation? The terror, the remorse, the hypocrisy of this astonishing being, flitting in frightful succession over her countenance, and actuating her agitated gestures with her varying emotions, present, perhaps, one of the greatest difficulties of the scenic art, and cause her representative no less to tremble for the suffrage of her private study than for its public effect."

Her final dismissal of the guests, and interruption of Rosse, brought down bursts of applause. Then came the sleep-walking scene, which she gave in different fashion to that of preceding actresses. They caught at the idea of sleep, laid themselves out to impress that notion on the audience by gliding about, carrying the candle, &c.; whereas, as Mr. Boaden accurately remarks, somnambulism repeats the motions of waking life. She conceived that the fancy would be so strong as to give her actions an air of wakefulness, and this explains the much-debated "laying

down the candle," the washing her hands in an imaginary ewer, &c. Carrying about a candle would be too forced and artificial ; and a somnambulist would certainly lay it down on the table. All through this scene, with her floating white draperies, she conveyed the idea of something associated with the tomb, and her deep articulation, scarcely above a whisper, was heard all over the theatre.

In considering these little sketches of Mrs. Siddons's playing, or indeed that of any actor or actress, one point should not be left out of view—the development or alterations which time will bring. The faults, therefore, that have been found at the first representation of a character may disappear, or study may bring an entirely new conception. She owned herself that she had improved in all her characters. But her later performances of Shakspearian parts, if they gained in finish, seem to have lost in spirit ; and many critics complained of her greater elaboration and measured deliberation as she advanced in her career.

"My idea of Constance, in *King John*," she says in her notes, "is that of a lofty and proud spirit, associated with the most exquisite feeling of maternal tenderness. . . . She is noble in mind and com-

manding in person and demeanour ; capable of all the varieties of grand and tender expression, often agonized, though never distorted by the vehemence of her agitations. Her voice, too, must have been '*propertied like the tuned spheres,*' obedient to all the softest inflections of maternal love, to all the pathos of the most exquisite sensibility, to the sudden burst of heart-rending sorrow, and to the terrifying imprecations of indignant majesty, when writhing under the miseries inflicted on her by her dastardly oppressors and treacherous allies. The actress, whose lot it is to personate this great character, should be richly endowed by nature for its various requirements ; yet, even when thus fortunately gifted, much, very much remains to be effected by herself ; for in the performance of the part of Constance great difficulties, both mental and physical, present themselves."

And here she touches on a point of great importance to the player, and which shows how admirably conscientious she was in her duty to the claims of the part. The passage that follows should be studied by every player :—

"And perhaps the greatest of the former class is that of imperiously holding the mind reined-in to the

immediate perception of those calamitous circumstances which take place during the course of her sadly eventful history. The necessity for this severe abstraction will sufficiently appear, when we remember that all those calamitous events occur whilst she herself is absent from the stage; so that this power is indispensable for that reason alone, were there no other to be assigned for it. Because, if the representative of Constance shall ever forget, even behind the scenes, those disastrous events which impel her to break forth into the overwhelming effusions of wounded friendship, disappointed ambition, and maternal tenderness, upon the first moment of her appearance in the third act, when stunned with terrible surprise she exclaims:—

“ ‘Gone to be married—gone to swear a peace!  
False blood to false blood joined—gone to be friends!’

—if, I say, the mind of the actress for one moment wanders from these distressing events, she must inevitably fall short of that high and glorious colouring which is indispensable to the painting of this magnificent portrait.”

What light, too, the following throws upon the true principles of acting:—

“Whenever I was called upon to personate the

character of Constance, I never, from the beginning of the play to the end of my part in it, once suffered my dressing-room door to be closed, in order that my attention might be constantly fixed on those distressing events which, by this means, I could plainly hear going on upon the stage, the terrible effects of which progress were to be represented by me. Moreover, I never omitted to place myself, with Arthur in my hand, to hear the march, when, upon the reconciliation of England and France, they enter the gates of Angiers to ratify the contract of marriage between the Dauphin and the Lady Blanche; because the sickening sounds of that march would usually cause the bitter tears of rage, disappointment, betrayed confidence, baffled ambition, and, above all, the agonizing feelings of maternal affection, to gush into my eyes. What countenance," she says, "what voice, what gesture shall realize the scorn and indignation of her reply to the heartless King of France. . . . And the awful, trembling solemnity, the utter helplessness of that soul-subduing, Scriptural, and prophetic invocation, 'Arm, arm, ye Heavens, against these perjured Kings!' If it ever were, or ever shall be portrayed with its appropriate and solemn energy, it must be then, and then only, when



the power I have so much insisted on, co-operating also with a high degree of enthusiasm, *shall have transfused the mind of the actress into the person and situation* of the august and afflicted." She owned that she knew not a greater difficulty than to fitly represent Constance. "Therefore, whether the majestic, the passionate, the tender Constance, has ever yet been, or ever will be, personated to the entire satisfaction of sound judgment and fine taste, I believe to be doubtful; for I believe it to be nearly impossible."

And here we are at a loss which to admire most, the acuteness and the nice judgment, or the extreme modesty of this wonderful and gifted woman.

"With what unutterable tenderness," says Campbell, "was her brow bent over her pretty Arthur at one moment, and in the next how nobly drawn back in a look at her enemies that dignified her vituperation! When she patted Lewis on the breast with the words 'Thine honour!' there was a sublimity in the laugh of her sarcasm. I could point out the passages where her vicissitudes of hurried and deliberate gesture would have made you imagine that her very body seemed to think." Then there was the great scene in the fourth act, which she herself says

must determine that maternal tenderness was the prominent feature of the character.

The third of her great characters, which some considered equal to her Lady Macbeth, was Queen Katherine. The sustained majesty and pathos of this part could only be effectively conveyed by such a process as Mrs. Siddons herself adopted—viz., by being penetrated with the character, which presents no opportunity for conventional bursts and claptrap. But when there is genius or instinct present, the mere *bearing* of the figure becomes acting of the highest order. In her level passages the majesty of form and mind joined to produce the effect. During what was called the “trial scene,” she produced in her hearers the most painful sense of interest for one who was suffering. There were perfect raptures about her challenge to Wolsey, “Lord Cardinal! to you I speak!” though the “business” she was supposed to have introduced—viz., of the *other* Cardinal’s rising, as if she had spoken to him, seems un-Shakspearian. “Those who have seen it,” says an enthusiastic Edinburgh critic, “will never forget it; but to those who have not, we feel it impossible to describe the majestic self-correction of the petulance and vexation which, in her perturbed

state of mind, she feels at the misapprehension of Campeius, and the intelligent expression of countenance and gracious dignity of gesture with which she intimates to him his mistake, and dismisses him again to his seat. And no language can possibly convey a picture of her immediate re-assumption of the fulness of majesty, glowing with scorn, contempt, anger, and the terrific pride of innocence, when she turns round to Wolsey, and exclaims, 'To you I speak!' Her form seems to expand, and her eye to burn with a fire beyond human. Wolsey obeys the summons, and requests to know her pleasure; she proceeds to make her charge and her refusal."

Then on Wolsey's cold "Your pleasure, madam?" her piteous reply and miserable abandonment touched every heart. So when he entreated her patience, her wild and bitter reply, "I will, when you are humble."

In her dying scene there was a gradation, and it was noticed that she showed all the fretful restlessness of a sick person, changing the pillows, but yet doing it with a subdued and reserved dignity. No wonder that Mr. Campbell seemed to find a strange similarity between her own character and that of the Queen, which, though a little fanciful, still could be sup-

ported so far, since it seemed, of all her round of characters, to be the one that came to her most naturally.

Her Volumnia, in *Coriolanus*, has not the same distinctness, for its interest was divided with what was perhaps her brother's greatest performance. But the fine Roman air she gave to the part, and the motherly pride she threw into it, were in themselves a triumph of acting. Even when the grand procession wound round the stage, she extorted enthusiastic admiration for so simple a thing as her walk, which told her whole story; her pride, fondness, and exultation winning all hearts as she advanced and looked from side to side.

Isabella, in Southerne's *Fatal Marriage*, one of the most heart-rending plays on the stage, was perhaps the most effective and interesting of all her characters, and the most suited to exhibit her gifts. It may be doubted, had she chosen any other piece for her great *début*, if she would have made so triumphant a success. *Macbeth* she had not then studied; Queen Katherine appeared in but two acts; but Isabella was the most piteous spectacle of grief and misery and despair that could be conceived. We can see how she looked in the fine engraving after Hamilton—the tall me-

lancholy lady in deep black, with her boy, and the most tenderly interesting expression on her face. There were scarcely any "points" to notice in this play, for it was all grief. When asked, on the arrival of the creditors, what she would do, an answer so simple as "Do! Nothing!" did not seem to offer much scope for expression; but her gesture and tone seemed to tell a whole story. The grief and despair of the last act were found too awful, and the wild laugh with which she stabbed herself struck such a chill of horror to the audience that it was remarked they had not heart to give any applause. It is curious even now to read this distressing play, and see how even the meagre description of this wonderful woman helps to give us a vivid idea of the story.

Godwin delighted to talk of her merits. Though but an indifferent writer for the stage, he was a real dramatist—witness that most remarkable of stories "Caleb Williams." He was an ardent admirer of Garrick, yet he confessed to Mr. Campbell that he thought Mrs. Siddons possessed finer powers. Of this there can be no question.\* He was loud in his

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\* Mr. Campbell records this judgment in his own singular way. "He said that, *in spite* of Garrick's superior versatility, Mrs. Siddons

praises of her Zara and her Almeria. He put his opinions on paper and wrote to the poet:—

“It struck me, after you left us, this morning, that I had answered your question respecting Mrs. Siddons’s performance of the character of Portia, in the *Merchant of Venice*, with more than my usual imperfectness and generality; and, as you flatter me by laying a stress on my opinion, I am desirous of supplying this defect.

“I should say, therefore, that there was a most striking fascination in her manner of exhibiting what she had to do in the fifth act. The scene is merely a light one, exhibiting the perplexity into which she throws Bassanio, by persisting that he had given his ring to a woman, and not to a man. This would appear almost nothing from a female of gamesome and rattling character, and would have made little impression. But Mrs. Siddons had a particular advantage, from the gravity of her general demeanour; and there was something inexpressibly delightful in beholding a woman of her general majesty condescend

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showed at times conceptions of her characters which he thought more sublime than anything even in Garrick’s.” To say nothing of the curious use of the words “in spite of,” we here find “versatility” and “sublimity” compared.

for once to become sportive. There was a marvellous grace in her mode of doing this; and her demure and queen-like smile, when, appearing to be most in earnest, she was really most in jest, gave her a loveliness that it would be in vain for me to endeavour to find words to express.”\*

Young happily described her rather laborious attempt at Rosalind:—

“Her Rosalind wanted neither playfulness nor feminine softness; but it was totally without archness,—not because she did not properly conceive it; *but how could such a countenance be arch?*”

Miss Seward, though inclined to be rapturous over every attempt of the great actress, was judicious enough to take exception to this performance:—

“For the first time I saw the justly celebrated Mrs. Siddons in comedy, in Rosalind; but though her smile is as enchanting as her frown is magnificent—as her tears are irresistible, yet the playful scintillations of colloquial wit, which most strongly mark that character, suit not the dignity of the Siddonian form and countenance. Then her dress was injudicious. But when she first came on as the

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\* Campbell's “Life of Siddons.”



Princess, nothing could be more charming; nor than when she resumed her original character, and exchanged comic spirit for dignified tenderness."

It is surprising that, with this almost universal condemnation of her attempts in this unsuitable walk of the drama, she should have persisted to the end in the idea that she was fitted for comedy.

Young also gave to Mr. Campbell the following intelligent critique on her general style of playing:—

"I look back to those periods during which I had the good fortune to act with her as the happiest of my professional recollections. She was the most lofty-minded actress I ever beheld. Whatever she touched she ennobled. She never sought by unworthy means to entrap her audience. She disdained to apply to any of the petty resources of trickish minds, in order to startle and surprise her hearers. There was no habitual abruptness, no harshness about her. You never caught her slumbering through some scenes, in order to produce, by contrast, an exaggerated effect in others. She neglected nothing. From the first moment to the last, she was, according to theatric parlance, '*in the character.*' The spectator was always carried along with her;—'*wept when she wept, smiled when she smiled, and each motion of her*

*heart became in turn his own.*' There were no pauses protracted till they became unintelligible. What was passing in her mind was read in her changing countenance."

A different class of piece was *The Grecian Daughter* of Murphy, in which she played Euphrania. It was one of those cold, bombastic plays, full of that stiff, classical suffering, of which the French are so fond. It was besides founded on that most disagreeable subject, but it gave her an opening for exhibiting filial virtue, for braving persecution, defying tyrants, &c., which, as it were, lifted her out of the gloomy key of *Isabella*. This was a special department in which her genius found play—viz., a mother's shielding a son, a daughter a father, a wife or husband under persecution. It might be called "exulting virtue." In this piece, too, she could exhibit queenly powers, and her rushing in with "War on, ye heroes!" her noble attitude and voice kindled the whole house. The finest effect in the play was when it was pretended that her father was dead, when her filial agony seemed so terrible that it was communicated to the spectators, who were in a fever till the suspense was terminated.

Mr. Bartley described to Campbell how much

he was affected by her performance in another drama :—

“I despair of being able to convey any idea of the wonders which Mrs. Siddons wrought in *The Earl of Warwick* ; for wonders they may be called, as I agree with you that it is a very indifferent tragedy. But especially I feel the difficulty of giving you any idea of that indelible impression which she made upon me, as Margaret of Anjou, in the last act of the piece. The performance I allude to must have occurred either in 1809 or 1810, at least twenty-four years ago ; and yet, to my imagination, she stands before me at this instant.

“On that occasion I happened to personate the character of King Edward the Fourth, who, in the scene referred to, learns that Warwick has taken Margaret and her son captives, and is momentarily expecting the triumphant appearance of Warwick. He does not know (nor does the audience) that Margaret had taken advantage of an unguarded moment to approach and stab Warwick as he stood in triumph over her son. Instead of Warwick, therefore, Margaret enters : and the skilful management made by this great performer to produce her effect was the following :—The scene had a large archway, in the

centre, at the back of the stage. She was preceded by four guards, who advanced rapidly through the archway, and divided, two and two on each side, leaving the opening quite clear. Instantly, on their separating, the giantess burst upon the view, and stood in the centre of the arch motionless. So electrifying was the unexpected impression, that I stood for a moment breathless. But the effect extended beyond me: the audience had full participation of its power; and the continued applauses that followed gave me time to recover and speculate upon the manner in which such an extraordinary effort had been made. I could not but gaze upon her attentively. Her head was erect, and the fire of her brilliant eyes darted directly upon mine. Her wrists were bound with chains, which hung suspended from her arms, that were dropped loosely on each side; nor had she, on her entrance, used any action beyond her *rapid walk* and *sudden stop*, within the extensive archway, which she really *seemed to fill*. This, with the flashing eye, and fine smile of appalling triumph which overspread her magnificent features, constituted all the effort which usually produced an effect upon actors and audience never surpassed, if ever equalled."

In Rowe's *Jane Shore*, another lugubrious play—

and it is amazing what a taste there was for these dramatic spectacles of misery—the finest and most effective passage was her last interview with her husband, when she sobbed out, “Forgive me! *But* forgive me!”—the intense feeling of which appeal made the whole house break forth in sobs and shrieks. Her eyes seemed to lose their lustre, and though open, were faded and sightless, but kindled up once more as they fell on her husband. It was, in short, a succession of amazing changes.

Another in this list of suffering ladies was Belvidera in that tender play, *Venice Preserved*. All these heroines resemble each other, and it may be suspected there was no very great distinctiveness in Mrs. Siddons’s representation of their sorrows. Belvidera, however, is nearly all rapture, love, and soft tenderness; and when she was young, her acting in it was received as something complete and nearly perfect. To those who saw her in her later life, when her style had “hardened,” as it were, it did not seem so satisfactory. Her meeting with Jaffier, “I joy more in thee than did thy mother when she hugged thee first,” was a picture of entrancing joy; as well as her burst, “Oh, I will love thee, even in madness love thee!” Her scene, too, among the con-

spirators, the almost shriek, "Part! must we part!" thrilled the house. The searching agony, too, with which she scrutinized every face without speaking, was one of her special powers. Her cry, "Jaffier!" as she was borne away—her heartfelt reproach, "Oh, thou unkind one!"—the meaning she threw into "Remember the hour of twelve!" and the fashion in which she sprang to his arms when he threatened to kill her, "Now, then, kill me!" were "points" which the playgoers of the time were never weary of recalling. And yet no actress ever dealt less in those claptrap traditional "points" of the sort that have been celebrated, of Clairon and Rachel, and others, like *Zaire tu pleurs*—the sudden striking of an attitude or a short exclamation. Mrs. Siddons's effects belonged to the piece itself—were part of its colouring, and were all "led up to." The last scene between Belvidera and her husband was one wrought up by her to a pitch of the most genuine and touching grief that could be conceived, and, as usual, sent the audience away wretched. But the play itself, even to read, is a miracle of piteous tenderness and interest.

It would indeed be an endless task to collect all the little scattered testimonies of her genuineness and thoroughness in playing her greater characters. The

late Miss Kelly used to tell how when Mrs. Siddons leant over her at some tragic crisis she felt the tears dropping on her face. Tom Davies noticed that in the third act of the *Fair Penitent* she became so affected that "her paleness was seen through her rouge." Had these instances been reported to Johnson, he must have owned that they supported a theory which he was inclined to reject—viz., that of the player identifying himself completely with his character, and for which, in the play of *Richard III.*, he would have awarded a sentence of summary execution. Davies's praise is hardly so warm as one might have expected, though still hearty and abundant. "Her modulation of grief," he owned, "in her plaintive pronunciation of the interjection 'Oh!' was sweetly moving, and reached to the heart. Her eye was full of information"—a quaint and happy phrase. Her person was infinitely in her favour; she certainly, he thought, did not spare herself, and neither the great nor the vulgar could say that she was not in downright earnest. It must be recollected, however, that Davies had seen Mrs. Pritchard, Woffington, and some others of the great school, and was a little of the "laudator temporis acti." There was another who had seen three great actresses, Pritchard,



Siddons, and Cibber—the ‘blue,’ Miss Seward. “Mrs. Siddons,” she says, “had all the pathos of Mrs. Cibber, with a thousand times more variety in its exertion.” John Taylor had also seen both, and he had remarked a sort of likeness in the pitch or key of their voices. Lord Harcourt, too, had seen Pritchard and compared their powers.\* He had seen Yates and Crawford, and pronounced that she had all the dignity of the first with all the tenderness of the second.

There are little stories, trifling in themselves, preserved among the legends of the stage, which show in a remarkable way the *power* of her gifts. These are founded on her effect on those players who were acting with her. An actress who was playing with her in *Hamlet* was so affected that she hesitated for a time and forgot her part. Mr. Campbell was told by Young, always a warm and judicious admirer of the actress, of a similar scene.

“He was acting Beverley with her on the Edinburgh stage, and they had proceeded as far as the fourth scene in the fifth act, when Beverley has swallowed the poison, and when Bates comes in, and says to the dying sufferer, ‘Jarvis found you quarrelling with

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\* Cunningham’s “Walpole,” vol. viii. p. 315.

Lewson in the streets last night.' Mrs. Beverley says, 'No, I am sure he did not!' to which Jarvis replies, '*Or if I did?*' meaning, it may be supposed, to add, 'the fault was not with my master;'—but the moment he utters the words '*Or if I did?*' Mrs. Beverley exclaims, '"Tis false, old man!—*they had no quarrel—there was no cause for quarrel!*' In uttering this, Mrs. Siddons caught hold of Jarvis, and gave the exclamation with such piercing grief that Mr. Young said his throat swelled, and his utterance was choked. He stood unable to speak the few words which, as Beverley, he ought to have immediately delivered; the pause lasted long enough to make the prompter several times repeat Beverley's speech, till Mrs. Siddons, coming up to her fellow-actor, put the tips of her fingers on his shoulders, and said, in a low voice, 'Mr. Young, *recollect yourself.*'"

Even a more remarkable and genuine instance of this influence was given during a performance of *Henry VIII.*, when she addressed a raw "supernumerary," who was playing the Surveyor, warning him against giving false testimony against his master:—

"If I know you well,

You were the Duke's surveyor, and lost your office  
On the complaints o' the tenants. Take good heed  
You charge not in your spleen a noble person."

Her scorn was so withering—her look so menacing, that the actor came off literally perspiring with terror, and protesting that he would not venture again to meet her terrible look of severity. Such was her power amid all the hackneyed associations of the side scenes, and it helps us to form an idea of what it was over an unsophisticated audience.

Washington Irving's impressions of the great actress are pleasantly given, but are not so valuable as those of other observers, as there is a certain want of experience in theatrical affairs, natural in an American of his day :—

“ Were I to indulge without reserve in my praises of Mrs. Siddons, I am afraid you would think them hyperbolical. What a wonderful woman ! The very first time I saw her perform I was struck with admiration. It was in the part of Calista. Her looks, her voice, her gestures, delighted me. She penetrated in a moment to my heart ; she froze and melted it by turns—a glance of her eye, a start, an exclamation, thrilled through my whole frame. The more I see her the more I admire her. I hardly breathe while she is on the stage. She works up my feelings till I am like a mere child. And yet this woman is old, and has lost all elegance of figure. Think, then,

what must be her powers, that she can delight and astonish even in the characters of Calista and Belvidera! In person Mrs. Siddons is not unlike her sister Mrs. Whitlock, for she has latterly rather outgrown in size the limits even of *embonpoint*. I even think there is some similarity in their countenances, though that of Mrs. Siddons is infinitely superior. It is, in fact, the very index of her mind; and in its mutable transitions may be read those nice gradations of passion that language is inadequate to express. In dignity and grace she is no way inferior to Kemble, and they never appear to better advantage than when acting together. What Mrs. Siddons may have been when she had the advantages of youth and form I cannot say, but it appears to me that her performance at present leaves room to wish for nothing more. Age has planted no visible wrinkles on her brow, and it is only by the practice and experience of years that she has been enabled to attain her present consummate excellence."

The volume of water-colour drawings by Miss Sackville Hamilton, before alluded to, furnishes complete evidence as to the style of costume adopted by Mrs. Siddons for her various characters. There is no such minute record in existence as to the dress of any other

known actor or actress. These details may not be thought of much importance, but they are certainly interesting, and especially curious for the student of stage manners.

It may be said at once of the dresses which the industry of this young lady has preserved for us, that they are nearly all in the worst conceivable taste. The great actress, it is plain, delighted in gaudy colours and flaring contrasts.

She seems to have always appeared in the short-waisted dresses of the Empire, which, to one of a full figure, was singularly unbecoming. Her stage dresses, too, except in the instance of Eastern characters, were nothing more than elaborate variations of the ordinary costume then in fashion. This shows us how backward, even in her day, were notions of stage propriety. She was fond of gold and silver trimmings, crowns, tiaras, and stage jewels, and when she played a gloomy or highly tragical character, appeared in black velvet or black satin. In almost every character she wore a long veil, either black or white, and from her shoulders floated gossamer-like streamers. These adornments seemed more suited to the conventional and rather primitive conception of the "Tragedy Queen" than to the genius of an original actress. But

the truth was, as I have before pointed out, the Kembles were not a little "stagey" in their method, and rather cramped their natural ability with too great a reliance on the solemn accessories of "the boards."

Her dress in the early part of *Macbeth* was a heavy black robe, with a broad border which ran from her shoulders down to her feet, of the most vivid crimson, with also a long white veil. In the third act, she changed this costume for another black dress, with great gold bands lacing it across, and gold ornaments round her neck and in her hair. In Queen Katherine her dress was a puce-coloured flowing robe and train, with a white vest and petticoat. When the more tragic scenes came on, she assumed a sort of speckled black and white lace mantle, over a black silk dress, with a coronet and necklace of pearls. The effect was truly funereal. In Constance she wore black velvet and gold, a white veil, and a diadem. In Belvidera, black satin, with a white petticoat. In Isabella she had nearly the same; but in the third act, assumed white and gold. In Calista, she appeared in a vivid cerise-coloured robe, with white petticoat and white cords and tassels. In the *Grecian Daughter* she wore a white dress under a heavy

purple mantle and train, all trimmed with gold. In Hermione she appeared in white, with a sort of cloak trimmed with yellow. The Eastern Zara exhibited a tall plume of gaudy feathers, a vivid green robe and train, a yellow bodice, and a white petticoat embroidered in colours. It is impossible to describe the effect of this execrable combination. Elvira appeared in a vast green velvet mantle and train; Jane Shore in a dull brown robe, with a white petticoat. In Portia, she wore a huge yellow hat and plume. In *Mary Queen of Scots* she appeared in yellow. As the Lady in *Comus* she wore blue. As Hamlet she wore a black fringed cloak, draped about her like a lady's shawl, and the general effect was that of a burly ill-formed man. If we may judge by her costume in Mrs. Oakley, her light comedy costume was singularly inappropriate, which consisted of a deep brown pelisse, with an enormous muff that covered half her figure, and a vast nodding plume of feathers. A tall and portly woman thus arrayed, must have presented a grotesque appearance. Mean and disagreeable too was her aspect when she condescended to assume the character of the cobbler's wife, in *The Devil to Pay*—a red stuff gown, blue apron, shock head of hair, &c.

The clever young artist, while conveying accurately



these various dresses, seized also some of her most striking attitudes and poses. These, it must be confessed, seem rather artificial, and want variety. They convey the idea that the great actress knew the merit of her long and handsomely shaped arms, and accordingly wound and bent them so as to obtain all the advantage possible from these beautiful limbs. This must have given rather a monotony to her attitudes. In Calista, when she exclaimed "Scorned by the women, pitied by the men," her head and waist were drawn back, the right hand was pressed to her forehead, while the other arm was extended backwards. In Constance, at the exclamation, "A widow cries," &c., the head was drawn back, while both her hands were clasped together.

With the help of these sketches a very fair idea may be gathered of the general principles on which Mrs. Siddons conceived her characters. But her genius and passion are of course impalpable and indescribable by language; and none but those who sat in the theatre and witnessed her performances could have an idea even of the electric power that made her famous. The characteristic features of her playing may be thus summarized: in the early portion of her

career, an unsurpassed tenderness and pathos, united with a majestic grandeur; in her later days, a nobility and overpowering dignity, a terrible majesty which became the better portion of her genius, and perhaps overpowered all the other qualities.

## CHAPTER XII.

## IN RETIREMENT.

HAVING thus attempted a survey of Mrs. Siddons's gifts and genius, it might be supposed that the withdrawal of such a genius from the stage would have left a sudden blankness, and filled all lovers of true dramatic amusement with grief and regret. It is mortifying to have to say that she was almost at once forgotten. The truth is she had never touched—save, perhaps, during her first season—the *private* sympathies of the public. That association of “money getting,” no matter how often the charge was refuted, always clung to her; and the rather homely but praiseworthy object for which she was labouring, the support of a numerous family of children, a little too much *pronèd*, was not likely to excite much favour. The spectacle, too, of a portly, elderly lady, moving with difficulty over the stage, could not fail to offer a painful contrast for those who had seen her in her greater days. There are always

conventional compliments, so much flattering unction, for the failing great artist: "As fine as ever," "Never played more splendidly," &c.; but these praises are always painful to listen to, and, when the artist is compared with his former splendid self, can never be considered founded in truth.

For another reason, which made her departure little felt, she herself was accountable. Her prolonged absences from the London theatres, while she was wasting her health and strength scouring all the provinces of the kingdom, making money out of little country theatres, had accustomed the London audiences to do without her for considerable intervals. Even when in town her quarrels with Sheridan had led to the same feeling. Finally, there was the strong "family interest," the innumerable Kembles, gathered often at one theatre, and whose number rather distracted the public. Still in the case of so great an artist such sudden forgetfulness was almost cruel.

Now she was to feel that trial—so terrible for the great actress—the terrible blank, the splendid and almost supernatural excitement of the stage. In her case, who had swept along thousands in her train, who had been stimulated by their sobs and tears and rapt gaze, it was like the extinction of all that gave

spirit or excitement to life. Long after she confided to Moore, with an *épanchement du cœur* which made him feel the deepest interest in her—the only time she had ever done so off the stage—how bitterly she felt the desolation. To Rogers she complained of the *ennui* that came upon her during the long evenings when she had to sit at home. She was thinking, she said, “Now I used to be going to dress; now the curtain is about to rise!” Then came the memory of the uproarious greeting as she appeared on the stage. But what had led her into the many mistakes of her life, that sensitiveness and readiness to take offence at the public, always a defect in her character, seemed to be more conspicuous now. She looked on, and looked back with a certain bitterness at the treatment of others compared with her own. When some criticisms on her later style of acting, which, from her age, had become majestic at the expense of tenderness, reached her, she protested angrily, “To hear these people talk, one would think that I had never drawn a tear.” When they were rushing to see her brother’s last performances, giving him testimonials, dinners, &c., she spoke of the neglect with which *she* had been suffered to depart, and said she supposed that in another world woman would be treated better than in this one.

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When Miss O'Neil was being "run after," she seemed to complain that *she* had been forgotten. All this was so much querulousness. The truth was she had no reason to complain of the public, but it shows us that she was all the while one of those persons who are full of deep feeling, but who go through life utterly misunderstood. It was unfortunate, too, that she allowed either this feeling, or a wish to help her relations, to draw her back again to the public life she had quitted. These re-appearances, after a solemn farewell, are always injudicious, and if attempted from the motives of generosity to others, are singularly unfair to the artist, who presents a spectacle of power enfeebled by decay, and still more by want of practice. and at most only gratifies an undignified curiosity. She came forward two or three times for her brother Charles's benefit, in the years 1813, 1816, and 1819; and also for the widow of Mr. Cherry, besides giving ten or a dozen performances at Edinburgh for her son's children. This step, however well meant, was sure to bring her mortification. When she was first tempted back Miss O'Neil was in all the flush of her popularity, and caricatures were soon in the shop windows, representing the rival actresses, the one interesting and charming, the other fat and unwieldy,

and the whole labelled, "Late Extraordinary Re-appearance." On another occasion, in the year 1816, she was induced to emerge and play Lady Macbeth, to gratify the curiosity of the Princess Charlotte and the late King of the Belgians. This was surely no excuse—for such an exhibition should not have been asked for or pressed, which it probably was not; neither should she have lightly come from her retirement to give what could only have been an imperfect idea of her great powers. The result was mortifying, for the Princess sent word that she was unable to attend from illness, and Mrs. Siddons had to make her exertion for an ordinary audience. Her last appearance—"positively the last"—was in the year 1819, at Covent Garden, for her brother Charles's benefit, when she rather injudiciously chose the part of Lady Randolph; as of course she was compared with her former self, and fresh evidences of decay were found. It was thought to be overdone and too "fussy," though there were passages where the old fire and force came out. It had been wiser, and for her a *cheaper* gift, to have presented her brother with the few pounds which the exhibition brought, than to have furnished for idle curiosity the spectacle of an unwieldy person, of an infirm lady, now not far from



seventy years of age. Nor was there much consolation in the personal tribute of applause paid when young Norval exclaimed, "As thou excellest all of womankind," when the audience applied the line and endorsed it with rounds of applause.

On these occasions Hazlitt dealt with her with severity. "Players should be immortal," he wrote, "if their own wishes or ours could make them so; but they are not. They not only die like other people, but like other people they cease to be young, and are no longer themselves, even while living. Their health, strength, beauty, voice, fails them; nor can they, without these advantages, perform the same feats, or command the same applause, that they did when possessed of them. It is the common lot; players are only *not* exempt from it. Mrs. Siddons retired once from the stage; why should she return to it again? She cannot retire from it twice with dignity; and yet it is to be wished that she should do all things with dignity. Any loss of reputation to her is a loss to the world. Has she not had enough of glory? The homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it; she was regarded less with admiration than with wonder, as if a being of a

superior order had dropped from another sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. She raised tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander. She embodied to our imagination the fables of mythology, of the heroic and deified mortals of elder time. She was not less than a goddess, or than a prophetess inspired by the gods. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine. She was tragedy personified. She was the stateliest ornament of the public mind. She was not only the idol of the people, she not only hushed the tumultuous shouts of the pit in breathless expectation, and quenched the blaze of surrounding beauty in silent tears, but to the retired and lonely student, through long years of solitude, her face has shone as if an eye had appeared from heaven; her name has been as if a voice had opened the chambers of the human heart, or as if a trumpet had awakened the sleeping and the dead. To have seen Mrs. Siddons was an event in every one's life; and does she think we have forgot her? Or would she remind us of herself by showing us what *she was not*? Or is she to continue on the stage to the very last, till all her grace

and all her grandeur gone, shall leave behind them only a melancholy blank? Or is she merely to be played off as ‘the baby of a girl’ for a few nights?—Rather than so, come, Genius of Gil Blas, thou that didst inspire him in an evil hour to perform his promise to the Archbishop of Grenada, ‘and champion us to the utterance’ of what we think on this occasion.

“It is said that the Princess Charlotte has expressed a desire to see Mrs. Siddons in her best parts, and this, it is said, is a thing highly desirable. We do not know that the Princess has expressed any such wish, and we shall suppose that she has not, because we do not think it altogether a reasonable one. If the Princess Charlotte had expressed a wish to see Mr. Garrick, this would have been a thing highly desirable, but it would have been impossible; or if she had desired to see Mrs. Siddons *in her best days*, it would have been equally so; and yet without this, we do not think it desirable that she should see her at all. It is said to be desirable that a Princess should have a taste for the fine arts, and that this is best promoted by seeing the highest models of perfection. But it is of the first importance for Princes to acquire a taste for what is reasonable; and the second thing which it is desirable they should ac-

quire is, a deference to public opinion ; and we think neither of these objects likely to be promoted in the way proposed. If it was reasonable that Mrs. Siddons should retire from the stage three years ago, certainly those reasons have not diminished since ; nor do we think Mrs. Siddons would consult what is due to her powers or her fame in commencing a new career. If it is only intended that she should act a few nights in the presence of a particular person, this might be done as well in private. To all other applications she should answer—‘Leave me to my repose.’

“Mrs. Siddons always spoke as slow as she ought ; she now speaks slower than she did. ‘The line too labours, and the words move slow.’ The machinery of the voice seems too ponderous for the power that wields it. There is too long a pause between each sentence, and between each word in each sentence. There is too much preparation. The stage waits for her. In the sleeping scene, she produced a different impression from what we expected. It was more laboured and less natural. In coming on formerly, her eyes were open, but the sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered, and unconscious of what she did. She moved her lips in-

voluntarily: all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. At present she acts the part more with a view to effect. She repeats the action when she says, 'I tell you he cannot rise from his grave,' with both hands sawing the air, in the style of parliamentary oratory, the worst of all others. There was none of this weight or energy in the way she did the scene the first time we saw her, twenty years ago. She glided on and off the stage almost like an apparition. In the close of the banquet scene, Mrs. Siddons condescended to an imitation which we were sorry for. She said, 'Go, go,' in the hurried familiar tone of common life, in the manner of Mr. Kean, and without any of that sustained and graceful spirit of conciliation towards her guests, which used to characterize her mode of doing it. Lastly, if Mrs. Siddons has to leave the stage again, Mr. Horace Twiss will write another farewell address for her; if she continues on it, we shall have to criticise her performances. We know which of these two evils we shall think the greatest.

"Mrs. Siddons's appearance in *Lady Macbeth* at this theatre on Thursday drew immense crowds to every part of the house. We succeeded in gaining a seat

in one of the back boxes, and saw this wonderful performance at a distance, and consequently at a disadvantage. Though the distance of place is a disadvantage to a performance like Mrs. Siddons's Lady Macbeth, we question whether the distance of time at which we have formerly seen it is any. It is nearly twenty years since we first saw her in this character; and certainly the impression which we have still left on our minds from that first exhibition is stronger than the one we received the other evening. The sublimity of Mrs. Siddons's acting is such, that the first impulse which it gives to the mind can never wear out, and we doubt whether this original and paramount impression is not weakened, rather than strengthened, by subsequent repetition. We do not read the tragedy of *The Robbers* twice; if we have seen Mrs. Siddons in Lady Macbeth only once, it is enough. The impression is stamped there for ever, and any after-experiments and critical inquiries only serve to fritter away and tamper with the sacredness of the early recollection. We see into the details of the character, its minute excellences or defects; but the great masses, the gigantic proportions, are in some degree lost upon us by custom and familiarity. It is the first blow that staggers us; by gaining

time we recover our self-possession. Mrs. Siddons's Lady Macbeth is little less appalling in its effects than the apparition of a preternatural being ; but if we were accustomed to see a preternatural being constantly, our astonishment would by degrees diminish.

“ We do not know whether it is owing to the cause here stated, or to a falling-off in Mrs. Siddons's acting, but we certainly thought her performance the other night inferior to what it used to be. She speaks too slow, and her manner has not that decided, sweeping majesty which used to characterize her as the Muse of Tragedy herself. Something of apparent indecision is perhaps attributable to the circumstance of her only acting at present on particular occasions. An actress who appears only once a year cannot play so well as if she was in the habit of acting once a week. We, therefore, wish Mrs. Siddons would either return to the stage, or retire from it altogether. By her present uncertain wavering between public and private life, she may diminish her reputation, while she can add nothing to it.”

But when dealing with Kean, he could not help falling into a just comparison : “ But there is an insignificance of figure, and a hoarseness of voice, that necessarily *vulgarize*, or diminish our idea of the characters



he plays ; and perhaps to this may be added, a want of a certain correspondent elevation and magnitude of thought, of which Mrs. Siddons's noble form seemed to be only the natural mould and receptacle. Her nature seemed always above the circumstances with which she had to struggle : her soul to be greater than the passion labouring in her breast. Grandeur was the cradle in which her genius was rocked : for her *to be*, was to be sublime ! She did the greatest things with child-like ease : her powers seemed never tasked to the utmost, and always as if she had inexhaustible resources still in reserve. The least word she uttered seemed to float to the end of the stage : the least motion of her hand seemed to command awe and obedience."

This excellent critic gives some further notes on her general style of playing :—

" Yet she was a pantomime actress. Her common recitation was faulty. It was in bursts of indignation or grief, in sudden exclamations, in apostrophes and inarticulate sounds, that she raised the soul of passion to its height, or sunk it in despair.

" We remember her manner in the *Gamester*, when Stukely (it was then played by Palmer) declares his love to her. The look, first of incredulity and

astonishment, then of anger, then passing suddenly into contempt, and ending in bitter scorn, and a convulsive burst of laughter, all given in a moment, and laying open every movement of the soul, produced an effect which we shall never forget. Her manner of rubbing her hands in the night scene of *Macbeth*, and of dismissing the guests at the banquet, were among her finest things. We have, many years ago, wept outright during the whole time of her playing Isabella, and this we take to have been a higher employment of the critical faculties than doubling down the book in dog-ears to make out a regular list of critical common-places. To the tears formerly shed on such occasions, we may apply the words of a modern dashing orator, 'Sweet is the dew of their memory, and pleasant the balm of their recollection.'"

The year after her retirement, she was asked to read before the Court, and this renewed the old connexion of nearly thirty years before. Nothing can be more agreeable than her own account of the visit, given in a letter to her friend Mrs. Fitz Hugh, and which is to be found in Mr. Campbell's book:—

"I have been these three days meditating about writing you an account of my Windsor visit which

you have, no doubt, seen mentioned in the newspapers ; but, whether occasioned by the fatigue of that visit, or from an habitual tendency, my head has been more heavy and painful since my return home than it has been for many months ; but, though very far from well at present, I cannot resist the pleasure of telling you myself what I know you will be gratified to hear.—Take it thus verbatim.

“On the 18th (I think it was) I was in the middle of dressing to go and dine with Mrs. Damer, when an especial messenger arrived in the dusk, with a letter from my old friend the Dowager Lady Stewart, to tell me that the Queen had ordered her to write and say, ‘that her Majesty wished very much to hear me read, and desired to have an answer returned immediately to Carlton House, where the party from Windsor dined that day,’ which was Wednesday. I of course wrote that I should be happy to have the honour of obeying the Queen’s commands, and therefore left my own house on Friday, according to appointment, and went to Frogmore, where I was informed that everything would be prepared for my arrival. I got there about three, and was conducted into a very elegant drawing-room, where I sat till it was time to go to the Castle, and consult with Lady

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Stewart respecting the reading. I spent about an hour very agreeably in her apartment with herself and Princess Elizabeth, who appears the best-natured person in the world. We concluded for some part of *Henry VIII.*, some part of the *Merchant of Venice*, and to finish with some scenes from *Hamlet*. After this I dined with Madame Bechendoft, her Majesty's confidential gentlewoman. When Lady Harcourt returned, after dining with the Queen, I again went to her apartment, where Princess Elizabeth renewed her visit, and stayed and chatted very charmingly, of course, because her conversation was chiefly about the pleasure they had all formerly received from my exertions, and the delight of hearing me again. We then parted for the night, the ladies to the Queen's card-party, and I to Frogmore, where the steward and housekeeper came to me, to say that her Majesty and the Princess had been there in the morning and had left a message to desire that I would consider myself as in my own house, with repeated injunctions to make my residence there as agreeable as possible. The next day the whole Royal party from Windsor, with Princess Charlotte and the Dukes of Cambridge and Clarence, dined at Frogmore. Many of the gentry and nobility were invited to the reading; and

at about half-past eight I entered the room, where they were all assembled. The Queen, the Princesses, and the Duchess of York, all came to me, and conversed most graciously, till the Queen took her place. Then the company seated themselves, and I began. It all went off to my heart's content, for the room was the finest place for the voice in the world. I retired, sometimes, at her Majesty's request, to rest; and, when it was over, I had the extreme satisfaction to find that they had been all extremely delighted. Lady Stewart wrote me yesterday, that I am still the inexhaustible fund of conversation and eulogium. When the Queen retired, after the reading, Lady Stewart brought to me a magnificent gold chain, with a cross of many-coloured jewels, from her Majesty, and hung it about my neck before all the company. This was a great surprise, and you may imagine how so great an honour affected me. You may conceive, too, the pleasure it gave me, to be able to divert a few of those mournfully monotonous hours which these amiable sufferers, from the singularly afflicting nature of their misfortune, are doomed to undergo. I found that the Queen had been desirous that I should not return the next day, but stay, and read again to her at the Castle next night, which I was too happy

to do. This reading consisted of passages from "Paradise Lost," Gray's "Elegy," and "Marmion." When I went into the room, I found her Majesty, with all the Princesses, and the Princess Charlotte, seated, and a table and chair prepared for me, which she (most graciously saying she was sure I must still feel fatigued from the last night's exertion) ordered me to seat myself in, when I thanked her for the magnificent favour I had received, and hoped the reading of the preceding night had not fatigued her Majesty, for she really had a terrible cough and cold. She hoped that the keepsake would remind me of Frogmore, and said 'that it was impossible to be fatigued when she was so extremely delighted.' I then took my leave, intending to return home the next day, which was Monday, but, having long meditated a short visit to Lord and Lady Harcourt, who live at St. Leonard's Hill, about four miles from Frogmore, I called there, and Lady Harcourt persuaded me to remain with her, and was so good as to make me send for Cecilia and Miss Wilkinson. While I was there I received another command from her Majesty; and the next Sunday evening I read *Othello* to the Royal party at the Castle: and here my story ends. I have much to say if I had eyes and head;

my heart, however, is still strong, and I am, with undiminished affection, yours, S. S."

This suggested a convenient mode of making yet a little more money, and she commenced a course of readings at the Argyll Rooms, which were remarkably successful. She was dressed in white, and her dark hair, arranged in heavy bands over her forehead, and her wonderful eyes, helped to produce a surprising effect. Her selections were from Shakspeare and Milton. Even the manner in which she used her glasses was noticed as graceful and characteristic. With this form of entertainment she was always willing to gratify her friends; and she was besides fond of it herself. The late Mr. Sharpe would often propose to her to read a play of Shakspeare aloud, for their own amusement dividing the characters between them; and when she was staying at a little inn at the Cumberland lakes she would gratify the friends who were about her there by reading to them of an evening. A lady, now alive, has described to me a little scene which happened when she herself was very young, and when she had been taken to see "the great Mrs. Siddons." The child long after recalled the wonderful eyes, and particularly the long, silky eyelashes, which she noticed



were of extraordinary length, and curled upwards in a beautiful curve. The actress was very good-natured ; and on being told that the young girl was obliged to go away to the country, and would have no opportunity of seeing her, with much good-nature, she at once kindly said that the little girl should not be disappointed—that she would act for her there and then, and at once proceeded to recite from Milton and Shakspeare in her finest manner. So acute an observer as Miss Edgeworth wrote of her readings:—

“I heard Mrs. Siddons read, at her town house, a portion of *Henry VIII.* I was more struck and delighted than I ever was with any reading in my life. This is feebly expressing what I felt : I felt that I had never before fully understood or sufficiently admired Shakspeare, or known the full powers of the human voice and the English language. Queen Katharine was a character peculiarly suited to her time of life and to reading. There was nothing that required gesture or vehemence incompatible with the sitting attitude. The composure and dignity, and the sort of suppressed feeling, and touches, not bursts of tenderness, of matronly, not youthful tenderness, were all favourable to the general effect. I quite forgot to applaud—I thought she was what she ap-

peared. The illusion was perfect till it was interrupted by a hint from her daughter or niece, I forget which, that Mrs. Siddons would be encouraged by having some demonstration given of our feelings. I then expressed my admiration; but the charm was broken—

‘To Barry we gave loud applause,  
To Garrick only tears.’

“M. E.”

Miss Wynn, who heard her read *Macbeth*, owns that she never knew what the play was till then. The speeches of Macbeth himself and the witch scenes were what struck her the most. Mrs. Siddons contrived, in the sleep-walking scene, to discharge all expression from her fine eyes, leaving only a glassy stare. Mr. Greathead thought she had obtained some lights in dealing with the witches, from “Guy Mannering,” as there was a change in her interpretation of these passages shortly after that novel appeared.

The fame of her talent in this direction had long before brought her a rather remarkable compliment. One day she and her husband were asked to dine with the Chevalier St. Michael, brother of the King of Poland, and the object of the meeting was to arrange an expedition to Warsaw, where King Stanislaus, who was a good English scholar, was eager to hear

her read English plays. Her health was delicate at the time; and it was only a very substantial reward that could make up for the fatigues of such a journey. The arrangement, however, was not concluded, and four years later the King was deprived of opportunities of encouraging genius, by his own deposition.

With these defects of manner and humour—for they were no more—the world had not leisure to investigate the admitted charms of her disposition—the true worth, the engaging and almost girlish confidence which belonged to her real nature. The world, the public, is too busy—life is too short—for time to be devoted to the investigation of the comparative weight of manner and character. From this indifference she has suffered, and for this blemish has paid a severe penalty in being judged by her own contemporaries and by posterity to be a cold, haughty, and almost selfish woman. Her friends, however, knew her disposition, and in one of the most attractive of her letters she reveals herself with a grace and genuineness that is charming years before her retirement. Her friend Taylor had written the curious request to be permitted to write her life. Quietly putting aside the proposal, she gives this interesting sketch of herself:—

“Indeed, my dear friend, if you were to write my praises with the pen of men and angels, I should shrink from that celebrity which the partiality of so kind a biographer would confer : for how could I read without blushes those accounts of myself, which would be measures of his friendship, not standards of my worthiness ? I am content that you should deceive yourself about my talents and my character, because I have an interest, and perhaps a livelier interest than most people, I believe, imagine, in the opinion of those who give themselves the trouble to think of me at all. But my friends in general are very much mistaken in my character. It has pleased God to place me in a situation of great publicity, but my natural disposition inclines me to privacy and retirement ; and, though the applause that is the palm of Art is necessarily sweet to my sense, yet sweeter is the still small voice of tender relatives and estimable friends. You may therefore tell me as much as you please of those talents with which you say I am so miraculously gifted, and I will hear you with pleasure, and pray for a continuance of your illusion. But do not, *I conjure you*, at least till opinion has a little more sanctioned the idea, do not bid all the world gaze, and wonder, *and certainly laugh*, at my yet feeble efforts.

“I am very much obliged to Mrs. Robinson for her polite attention in sending me her poems. Pray tell her so with my compliments. I hope the poor charming woman has quite recovered from her fall. If she is half as amiable as her writings, I shall long for *the possibility* of being acquainted with her. I say, the possibility, because one’s whole life is one continued sacrifice of inclinations, which, to indulge, however laudable or innocent, would draw down the malice and reproach of those prudent people who never do ill, ‘but feed, and sleep, and do observances, to the stale ritual of quaint ceremony.’ The charming and beautiful Mrs. Robinson! I pity her from the bottom of my soul!

“Pray go and take Betsy to Marlborough Street, to see my bust of my little son George. I could have done it better, but for the extreme heat of the weather, which made the clay crack and dry too fast. Adieu. Your affectionate friend, S. SIDMONS.”

We do not find that Mr. Boaden was authorized by her to write her Life, which he had published during her lifetime. From the absence of all details of personal history, it may be concluded that she had no more than tolerated the undertaking, which was properly a history of the stage, in which she neces-

sarily played a leading part. Mr. Campbell, who afterwards undertook the duty, she regarded as her warmest friend. The poet had made the acquaintance of brother and sister in the year 1801, when he had been received by Kemble "with an air of dignified benevolence," and was made heartily welcome. Ten years later he went to see her when she was living at Westbourne, and met her walking "on the banks of the Paddington Canal." He grew nervous as he saw "the great woman" approaching, and "had to whip on his great-coat and adjust himself for the interview." He was overcome by the meeting, and she herself was much affected. She had met with many domestic losses since she had seen him. When she was dying she wrote a short memorandum in which she begged of this friend to undertake the duty of writing her life, and which pious act he faithfully performed.

The picture of her life in retirement is most interesting. Innumerable friends gathered about her. Mr. Campbell describes his astonishment at the long file of carriages which he found one day drawn up before her lodgings in Pall Mall; and certainly the list of her friends comprised all that was distinguished in rank and genius. We have seen what

was the character of her friends during the early "Johnsonian era," as it might be called. To these she had added such noble families as the Darnleys, Harcourts, Scarboroughs, Clares, Sidmouths, Campbells, Barringtons, Byrons, Noels. and many more. During the last years of her life she knew Sydney Smith, "Conversation" Sharpe, Joanna Baillie, Hannah More, Mrs. Piozzi, Sir George Beaumont, and the late Rev. Mr. Harness, whose recent death has been most unfortunate for this memoir. His recollections of the gifted actress were exceedingly abundant, and his friendship with her was so intimate that his testimony would have been of great assistance. Her acquaintance with Hannah More was of course tinged with the "serious" character of that lady's tone of mind, as will be gathered from a letter of hers sent to Mrs. Siddons:—

"MY DEAR MADAM,—I cannot refuse myself the gratification of returning you my sincere thanks for your very interesting and obliging letter, the piety of which delighted me still more than the kindness. Though the current of life has carried us different ways, and I have had the happiness of so little personal intercourse with you, yet I have been long assured that 'your ear was patient of a serious song.'



The serious spirit which pervades your letter is a strong confirmation of the opinion I have been long led to entertain of your devout disposition. Oh! my dear madam, there is no other lasting good, no other solid peace, no other final consolation. This has doubtless been your refuge and your preservation from the perils of the deserved praise and admiration which your extraordinary talents have so eminently obtained. I have heard that you consider the Bible as your treasure. May it continue to be your guide through life, and your support in that inevitable hour which awaits us all!

“It has pleased God to bless my little book with a degree of success which I had no reason to expect; but I can truly say, that among the favourable testimonies which kindness and partiality have bestowed on it, there is not one that has so highly gratified me as that of Mrs. Siddons. Believe me, my dear madam, with real regard, your affectionate friend, HANNAH MORE.”

This had been accompanied by a copy of the dreary “Sacred Dramas,” a present which the actress might later have returned by a copy of her own little venture in literature, which was a sort of compressed version of “Paradise Lost.” She had been in the habit, she

explains in the introduction, of reading aloud passages to herself from Milton, and had selected such portions as helped to make out a sort of continuous story, and which thus excited interest in children; and the success of this arrangement in the family circle tempted her to submit the whole to the public. The result, as may be imagined, was not very satisfactory.\* Among her friends she was exceedingly gay, and was fond of contributing her quota to the general fund of entertainment by a good story or song. It must be said, however, that some of the more ambitious efforts were rather ponderous; and in this she only shared the delusion common to so many other tragic players of fancying she possessed comic gifts. Joanna Baillie, however, told Scott that in the humorous passages of Shakspeare she was delightful; but a margin should be left for the indiscriminate admiration of a female friend whom a great artist was trying to amuse. So with some burlesque song, "Billy Taylor," which she often volunteered to sing, with serious gravity. She never could have been a humorist; though, through her letters and memo-

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\* The pleasant writers in the *London Magazine* were rather merry on the subject, told her plainly that she was destroying their ideal, and heartily wished she had never attempted such a thing.

randa runs an agreeable vein of gaiety. Mr. Crabbe Robinson, who saw her play the Lady in *Comus*, found her too heavy and tragic; and an Irish gentleman told the elder Mathews that he had seen her attempt Nell, in *The Devil to Pay*, at Dublin, which was the most ludicrous exhibition in the world from its laboriousness.

Now was the season when so many of our own generation met the great actress, and described the tall commanding lady, with the beautiful arm, the large hand, the rich fur-like eyelashes, moving in her stately fashion, and speaking in a tragic voice. Now came the crowd of pleasant stories as to her solemn tones heard in shops and at dinner-tables; her question to the draper, "*Will it wash?*" as though she were speaking to Macbeth; her blank verse to the Scotch Provost, "Beef cannot be too salt for me, my Lord!" and, "I asked for porter, boy; you've brought me beer." It was now that Moore met her, and was interested by her, though some twenty years before, when a mere lad, he had been taken to a little *fête* given at her cottage, which was filled with duchesses and countesses, &c., where all the walks were illuminated, so that the scene looked like fairy land. Sitting beside her, in 1828, at some breakfast, she

opened her heart and told him that she often got credit for feeling and force of acting when she was only relieving her heart ; and that after suffering for a while she found the stage at night a vent for her private sorrows. These little confidences show what an interesting character she was, and how little the outside public knew of her.\* As we have seen, her eyes were always turned to the true scenes of her triumphs, those where, as Cumberland described it to Rogers, she would come off the stage flushed with success, walk up to the green-room mirror and survey her fine figure calmly. Among her friends and admirers was found the late Crabb Robinson, whose voluminous diary has recently been published. He mentions a curious conversation that he had in the year 1811 with Mrs. Abington on the merits of the great actress, and who was by no means warm in her praise. She objected to the elaborate emphasis given to very insignificant words. "*That* was brought in by them," she added, with truth, alluding to the weakness of the family. "The excellence of Garrick," she said, "lay in his bursts and transitions of passion, and in

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\* The poet later heard her magic voice at a supper-table at Lady Mount Edgecombe's house, "I *do* love ale dearly."

the variety and universality of his genius." With this cold judgment may be compared the hearty approbation of Mrs. Clive, who during her last winter in town had been induced to accompany Mrs. Garrick to see the great actress, and who, in her own characteristic style, pronounced that "she was all truth and daylight." The opinion of these two women, who belonged to a past school, is extremely interesting; though the most valuable will be found to be that of Tom Davies, who had seen so many great players, and had very competent judgment.\*

The same agreeable diarist described Incedon dining with her, and singing "The Storm" for her with such effect, that she cried and sobbed and protested that all that she and her brother ever did, were as nothing compared with the delivery of that simple ballad! This, as we may imagine, was scarcely a deliberate judgment. Her dignity never deserted her, as will be evident from a little scene that occurred at Mr. Sotheby's, when she was placed next the eccentric

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\* Mrs. Garrick, that most wonderful of old ladies, and who was close upon a hundred years old when she died, was partial to her, and in the very year of her death added a codicil to her will, bequeathing the actress a pair of Shakspeare's gloves. This doubtful relic had been presented to Garrick during the enthusiasm of the Jubilee, by a soi-disant descendant of the great poet.

Richard Lovell Edgeworth—though to the end she was too much inclined to be touchy. Her neighbour addressed her :—"Madam, I think I saw you perform Millamant five and thirty years ago." "Pardon me, sir." "Oh then, it was forty years ago I recollect it." "You will excuse me, sir, I never played Millamant." "Oh, but I recollect it." "I think," said the stately lady, turning to Rogers, "it is time for me to change my place," and she rose with much haughtiness, and moved away.\* This seemed making too much of what was not intended for an affront, and came from a recognised eccentric. Crabb Robinson could bear testimony to her extraordinary power, and it is known that he was the young man who is described as having burst into loud laughter, in the pit, during the most terrible portion of her performance of *The Fatal Curiosity*. He was being forcibly ejected, when it was discovered that he was in violent hysterics. He too had seen her in some trifling farce, and described her attempt at humour as forced and much overdone.

Not the least of her social triumphs was the bringing round to her side Horace Walpole, who, it

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\* Crabb Robinson's Diary.

will be remembered, had all but pronounced himself a determined foe. He had met her one evening in the year 1788, at Lady Dorothy Hotham's, had paid her visits, had condescended to go often to the theatre to see her, and owned that he "liked her much, yes, very much." Her scorn was admirable, though he thought her deficient in the cold and declamatory portions. She asked him in what part would he like to see her, and actually suggested *Portia*, the character in which she made her grand failure. Such a choice suggests that weakness in the histrionic temper which always sets failure down to any cause but that of personal deficiency. It was also about this time, in 1813, that the accomplished American, Washington Irving, was introduced to her, and in one of his agreeable letters, he gives the following sketch of her:—"I had also the further treat of meeting Mrs. Siddons there, and having considerable conversation with her during dinner. It was a rich gratification to see the queen of tragedy thus out of her robes. Yet her manner even in the social board still partakes of the state and gravity of tragedy. Not that there is an unwillingness to unbend, but that there is a difficulty in throwing aside the solemnity of long-acquired habit. She reminded



me of Walter Scott's knights, 'who carved the meat with their gloves of steel, and drank the red wine through their helmets barred.' There was, however, entirely the disposition to be gracious, and to play her part like herself in conversation. She, therefore, exchanged anecdote and incident, in the course of which she detailed her feelings and reflections while wandering among the sublime and romantic scenery of North Wales, and on the summit of Penmaenmawr. As she did this, her eye kindled and her features beamed, and in her countenance, which is indeed a volume where one may read strange matters, you might trace the varying emotions of her soul. I was surprised to find her face, even at the near approach of sitting by her side, absolutely handsome, and unmarked with any of those wrinkles which generally attend advanced life. Her form is at present becoming unwieldy, but not shapeless, and is full of dignity. Her gestures and movements are eminently graceful. Mr. and Mrs. Campbell say that I was quite fortunate, and might flatter myself on her being so conversible, for that she is very apt to be on the reserve towards strangers."\*

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\* Irving's "Life and Letters," vol. i.

A few years later, a brother of the American essayist came to London and found his way to Mr. Campbell's house, where by an accident he and his friend met the great actress. In the "Life and Letters of Washington Irving," this gentleman appears an agreeable, pleasant character. Mr. Campbell gives a graphic account of the visit:—"During the same year she did me the honour of dining with me at my house in Sydenham, and it was to me a memorable day, from the ludicrous though happily temporary distress that attended it. Mrs. Siddons, much as she loved fame, detested being made a show of when she paid visits of mere personal friendship; and when she promised to dine with Mrs. Campbell and myself, it was on a distinct understanding that she was to meet only our own family. I was particularly anxious to keep my word on this point, and forbore to invite any of my friends, much as many of them would have been gratified by seeing her. About noon there arrived two strangers, American gentlemen. One of them was the brother of Washington Irving, and they both brought me letters of introduction from Sir Walter Scott. I was very happy to see them, but felt no small alarm when, from a servant having come into the room and babbled something about Mrs.

Siddons and dinner, my American guests discovered what I wished them not to know. 'Ha! Mrs. Siddons,' they exclaimed; 'then we will stay and dine with you also.' 'Well, gentlemen,' said I, 'tomorrow or next day, or any other day in the year, I shall be delighted to receive you hospitably; but really Mrs. Siddons laid her commands upon me that she should meet no strangers, and I cannot invite you to stop.' 'Oh, but we can stop,' said they, 'without invitation. You can get us out, to be sure, by calling in the constable, but, unless you force us away, we will have a sight of the Siddons.' And they kept their word. When her carriage approached the house, I went out to conduct her over a short pathway on the common, as well as to prepare her for a sight of the strangers. It was the only time, during a friendly acquaintance of so many years, that I ever saw a cloud upon her brow. She received my apology very coldly, and walked into my house with tragic dignity. At first she kept the gentlemen of the New World at a transatlantic distance; and *they* made the matter worse, as I thought, for a time, by the most extravagant flattery. But my Columbian friends had more address than I supposed, and they told her so many interesting anecdotes about their native stage, and the

enthusiasm of their countrymen respecting herself, that she grew frank and agreeable, and shook hands with both of them at parting."

This little scene seems to give a clue to her character, and to account for some of the unpopularity which so often pursued her. No woman of the world would have resented so haughtily the trifling inconvenience of having to meet two strangers, or made her host uncomfortable for such a reason.

In the year 1814 she and her brother found their way to Paris in the crowd of English who flocked to that city after the Restoration. One of their first visits was to the Louvre, where were collected all the most remarkable artistic objects of the Continent. Mr. Campbell was of the party, and describes the scene with some of those odd expressions which he seems to have reserved for his account of Mrs. Siddons:—"The Louvre was at that time in possession of its fullest wealth. In the statuary hall of that place I had the honour of giving Mrs. Siddons my arm the first time she walked through it, and the first time in both our lives that we saw the Apollo of Belvidere. From the farthest end of that spacious room the god *seemed to look down like a president* on the chosen assembly of sculptured forms, and his glowing marble, unstained by time,

appeared to my imagination as if he had stepped freshly from the sun. Every particular feeling of that hour is written indelibly on my memory. I remember entering the Louvre with a latent suspicion on my mind that a good deal of the rapture expressed at the sight of superlative sculptures was exaggerated or affected; but as we passed through the passage of the hall, there was a Greek figure, I think that of Pericles, with a chlamys and helmet, which John Kemble desired me to notice, *and it instantly struck me with wonder at the gentleman-like grace* which art could give to a human form with so simple a vesture. It was not, however, until we reached the grand saloon that the first sight of the god overawed my incredulity. Every step of approach to his presence added to my sensations, and all recollections of his name in classic poetry swarmed on my mind as spontaneously as the associations that are conjured up by the sweetest music.

“Engrossed as I was with the Apollo, I could not forget the honour of being before him in the company of so august a worshipper; and it certainly increased my enjoyment to see the first interview between the paragon of art and that of nature. She was evidently much struck, and remained a long time before the

statue, but, like a true admirer, was not loquacious. I remember, however, that she said, 'What a great idea it gives us of God to think that he has made a human being capable of fashioning so divine a form!' When we walked round to other sculptures, I observed that almost every eye in the hall was fixed upon her, and followed her; yet I could perceive that she was not known, as I overheard the spectators say, 'Who is she? Is she not an Englishwoman?' At this time she was in her fifty-ninth year; and yet her looks were so noble that she made you proud of English beauty, even in the presence of Grecian sculpture."

Mr. Crabb Robinson was also in the Louvre, and heard some one say that Mrs. Siddons was there. He rushed up, and saw her walking with Mrs. Twiss. He noticed her grand air and fascinating smile, though he remarked a line or two about her mouth, and a little coarseness of expression; also that she knit her brows to look at the pictures, as if her sight was not good. At one of her great receptions she was seen standing next the Duke of Wellington, without speaking to him, preserving a sort of haughty reserve, waiting for him to speak to her. This was characteristic. We do not hear of any superior honours, such as she well deserved, being paid to her by members of the French stage. There must have been some mischance

to account for this neglect, possibly the disorganization after the fall of Napoleon, but it was unlucky for the English Melpomene. A review was held by the King, and it was reported that the Siddons had been seen toiling along towards the Champ de Mars, heated and flushed, and in clouds of dust, and the old insinuation of "saving" again came up. She remained two months, and seems to have enjoyed herself a great deal.

But in the year following came another affliction, the loss of her son Henry, who was carried off by a consumption when only forty years old. He had no dramatic power, and, as his mother told Mr. Campbell, though he had been unfortunate in the choice of a profession, he had been very fortunate in his choice of a wife, a pleasing actress who had obtained the judicious praise of Scott and the Edinburgh dilettanti. It would seem that he was not a great favourite with his mother, whose affections were all centred in her daughters, and considering that he had challenged his uncle and adopted a profession for which he was unfitted in defiance of her wishes, he had not very strong claims on her regard. The instance of her refusal to play for him, save on strictly commercial terms, has been mentioned. When he took the Edinburgh Theatre, it was said that she had engaged to advance him 8000*l.*, but withdrew her promise later.



A story was told that illustrated the lofty character of her relations with him. "I wish," he said to Nicholson, the manager at Manchester, "you would be kind enough to give this letter to Mrs. Siddons, and contrive to do it in the course of business, as she will be offended if I intrude upon her." This was a request that she would play for his benefit. She sent for him, and in a haughty tone asked how he could venture to propose such a thing. "I thought, madam," he said, respectfully, "that as Saturday was a vacant night——" "I dine with the Bishop of Llandaff on that evening, and cannot comply with your request." "Good evening, madam." "Good evening, sir." This severity was no doubt intentional, for no more affectionate parent could be imagined. She felt his death acutely, and wrote to her friend Mrs. FitzHugh, "This hard shock has indeed sadly shaken me; and although in the very depths of affliction, I agree with you that consolation may be found: yet the voice of nature will for a time overpower that of reason. And I cannot but remember that such things were, and were most dear to me.

"I am tolerably well, but have no voice. This is entire nervousness, and fine weather will bring it back to me. Write to me and let me receive consolation

in a better account of your precious health." There was no quotation and no allusion to her own health when her girls were snatched from her.

In this fashion then the remainder of her life passed quietly away. A gratifying welcome was given her at the Universities, especially at Cambridge in the year 1819, when she received almost a public welcome, and read her favourite Milton and Shakspeare for a select party. As she went more into society she found her pretty little Westbourne cottage too much out of the way, and too small, and she took a house nearly at the top of Baker Street, which had a garden and a plot of grass attached to it, and there she built a studio, in which to carry on her modelling. This mansion was fitted up in a severe and stately manner, and with an almost Quaker-like simplicity. It was all panelled in dark oak wainscoting, while over the chimney-piece hung an equestrian portrait of her brother John, as Hotspur. There she gathered friends about her, new and old; there she gave pleasant parties; there she lived with her daughter Cecilia and the old manager's daughter, Miss Wilkinson, whom she now loved as though she were her own child; and there she was to die, full of years, admired and respected by all.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## PREPARATION FOR RETIREMENT.

THE theatre in which Kemble had so heavy a stake, was already beginning to decay. Though unable to furnish any novelty which would take hold of the town, he did not give way to any despondency; and possibly finding that his own talents were not sufficient to restore the fortunes of the house, he determined to try a country campaign that should combine both pleasure and profit. The state of the theatre was to be henceforth one of gradual decay. The ambition which grasped at returns from mere numbers, private boxes, and the like, at the sacrifice of the drama itself, was finding out slowly but surely that it was only killing the bird that had laid so many golden eggs. How wistfully must the proprietors have turned over the leaves of Garrick's Drury Lane Account Book for the year 1772-3, when with the modest expenses of about seventy pounds a night, and a house holding a little over one hundred pounds, a clear profit of

about six thousand pounds came to his share—this too with no costly outlay for constructed scenery, elaborate dresses, and properties. Fine acting alone was necessary.

With this view he went on a round of visits to his noble friends, and was made welcome by Lord Guildford at Wroxton, by Lords Holland, Egremont, Aberdeen, and Abercorn, at whose houses his grave gentlemanly manners, perfect sincerity, and cultivated mind, made him welcome. No temptation, it was remarked, could seduce him into revelations of the secrets of his dramatic prison-house ; or into those cheap arts of good stories, mimicry, ridicule of his profession, by which the player too often tries to stimulate the flagging interest in his own deficient gifts. This may seem too wholesale a censure ; but in our time, even on the stage itself, actors and playwright have joined to excite a languid curiosity, if not interest, by bringing on the boards the weaknesses and habits of members of their own profession ; and two successful plays have lately held up the buffooneries of “the actor’s dressing-room,” the jests of scene-shifters, while the general life “behind the scenes” has been exhibited for the amusement of the public. Kemble could never be induced to give the slightest encouragement to

such curiosity, while willing to discuss and explain any question connected with the true interests or dignity of his calling. Even when attempts were made to get him to read, he would quietly refer his friends to the passage itself.

We have seen that Kemble had been an eager follower of the fashion of the day—in being fond of deep drinking. Late in life, we are told that his practice somewhat abated in this respect, and it is characteristic of the man, that his conviviality never took the shape of coarse drunkenness. But he contrived to “carry his liquor discreetly,” his natural solemnity becoming intensified to an almost grotesque degree. Even in his cups it was the thought of his profession that came uppermost; and it was then that his friends were amused to hear him vehemently asserting his own merits.

The late Mr. Adolphus, in his recently published diary, gives a curious picture of Kemble at these convivial moments. A jovial night club used to assemble at Covent Garden, under the title of “The Finish,” including amongst its members some well-known roysterers, such as “Sparring Le Gai,” “Jack Tetterington,” and others, whose familiar designation seemed to denote their free and easy life. About five one

morning Kemble dropped in after a very late dinner-party, and began almost at once to dwell on his favourite topic—his own gifts, his standing at the head of his profession—and then recited from Shakspeare. The listeners were in high spirits, and broke in on the recitation with all manner of droll interruptions, Le Gai saying, “Well, Mr. Kemble, we give you leave to go on.” “Give me leave, sir!” replied Kemble, in his most haughty fashion, “as well might a barber at Rome have said to Coriolanus, ‘I give you leave to do something.’” The other retorted angrily, asking him what he meant by reflecting upon barbers. Kemble replied, “God forbid that I should say anything against barbers, for a relation of my own was once one,” alluding either to his father or his brother-in-law. After this the actor was prodigiously quizzed on his peculiarities of pronunciation, which put him in bad humour; and the landlady going by with a tray of glasses, and happening to touch him, the lofty tragedian swept all the glasses from the tray in a rage, cutting his hand severely. This, however, is a scene from Kemble’s early life. But Mr. Peake, the treasurer of Drury Lane Theatre, had many stories of a kindred sort. And there can be no doubt that Kemble never shook

himself free of a practice to which he unquestionably owed the comparatively premature decay of his health.

About this time he might have been disturbed by a performance which took place at Covent Garden, when Young, an actor who had been quietly making his way, played Cassius to his Brutus. This seems to have been one of those remarkable effects which occur now and then, and make their mark. Spectators were amazed at the freshness and vigour of Young's performance, and it was openly stated that the Cassius was a finer performance than the Brutus. How unfair to the older actor, or to any actor of the same standing, would be such a mode of comparison, will be evident from a moment's reflection. Kemble had been nearly thirty years before the public. His manner, mannerisms, and effects were all familiar. He was besides unpopular, and suffering from grave infirmities. A comparatively new actor, with a singular power of exciting sympathy, and imparting a new interest to a less important character, would come as a sort of surprise on his hearers, who had grown a little tired of the cultivated but highly-measured utterances of the old favourite, and whose dramatic despotism they were beginning to resent. It was also, as Dr. Doran says justly, the beginning of a protest against the mannerism of "the Kemble School;" and the coming of an



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actor of such promise, who played in the freest and most natural style, would be a most refreshing change. It has been said that Young made effective characters in which Kemble had failed; but this is no more than saying that Kemble had attempted characters which did not suit his powers. No one would place Charles Kemble on a level with his brother; yet Charles Kemble could play Cassio and Faulconbridge in a style which John Kemble could never have approached. The truth is, as it seems to me, that Young, neither in natural power, nor in the grand foundation of study and judgment, can be placed above Kemble; and popular tradition, no bad test in dramatic matters, supports this view. We think of Kemble's long career, his prodigious and lasting renown, the extraordinary effect upon his audiences all over the kingdom, and the reputation which was so steadily progressive. Young, on the other hand, a fine actor, falls into quite a different class, and he does not fill the same space; he does not light up an era; and it would be unfair, because he attracted more interest and sympathy than a great actor in his decay, to set aside the deliberate verdict of a whole generation. In the case of Edmund Kean, it will be seen there is more reason for disputing Kemble's supremacy.

Mr. Julian Young, in the recently published memoir of his father, which has been received with so much favour, describes graphically this performance. It is admitted that the play never has been so magnificently cast, and probably never will be, considering that players of such character as Kemble and his sister, Young, and Charles Kemble took part in it. The mounting and accessories were superb, and seem to have reached the just medium, not overloading the piece. "One would have imagined," says Mr. Young, "that the invariable white toga would have rendered it difficult at first for any but frequenters of the theatre to distinguish in the large number of the *dramatis personæ* on the stage John Kemble from Daniel Terry, or Charles Young from Charles Kemble. Whereas I feel persuaded that any intelligent observer, though he had never entered the walls of a theatre before, if he had studied the play in his closet, would have no difficulty in recognising in the calm, cold, self-contained, stoical dignity of John Kemble's walk the very ideal of Marcus Brutus, or in the pale, austere, wan, lean, and hungry look of Young, and in his quick and nervous *pace*, the irritability and restless impetuosity of Caius Cassius; or in the handsome joyous face and graceful tread of

Charles, his pliant body bending forward in courtly adulation of great Cæsar, &c.” This is most just, and this is what should be the note of true acting. The characteristics of the several actors are happily described. Mr. Planché has told me that nothing could exceed the splendid chivalry, the gallantry which Charles Kemble would throw into his bearing: who had no occasion to assert his character by speeches or gesture, but his very air and expression and noble figure spoke for him.

When Kemble was absent in Ireland, and disheartening accounts of the theatre were forwarded to him, he wrote back cheerfully, as if to encourage his partner, “that he wished the receipts were greater, so as to extinguish the debt.” However, he had wisely not risked his whole fortune in so precarious a venture as a theatre, and had other resources. After two years’ absence he presented himself to his audience, and was received with rapture. *Entrepreneurs* know well how curious is the humour of an audience, and what profit can be made out of it—how when it turns away languidly from an old idol, it only requires a display of indifference to itself, or a long absence, to find its admiration piqued into fresh ardour. Now-a-days the receipt for quickening the

flagging interest of the public is a journey to America. Laurel-wreaths were flung on the stage, the applause was uproarious—it seemed the greeting of some new favourite; the pit “rose at him.”\* The character was Coriolanus, which alone of all his characters he seemed to perform better every time that he played it. The tide had now turned. Yet during his absence the genuine rival had come. Edmund Kean, magnificent, free, impetuous, had rushed on the stage, and that “terrible earnestness,” at which Kemble had sneered, was a characteristic of true genius. He was affecting the public after a fashion that Kemble had never succeeded in doing. During his absence also “Master Betty,” now grown up into Mr. Betty, had come to appeal to the suffrages of the audience on his own fair merits, unassisted by the curiosity or interest attached to an “infant phenomenon.” Kemble must have smiled when he heard of the failure, and the fickle public, who had pronounced Betty equal to Garrick, did not care even to make a show of consistency. Great houses, representing six hundred

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\* “He now stipulated,” says Mr. Boaden, “to be allowed to dress in his own room; a matter which was considerably arranged by the *affectionate politeness* of Fawcett.” Considering that Kemble was a proprietor, and leading player, it might be supposed that he could dress where he pleased.

pounds receipts, testified to his attraction, and he himself was receiving fifty pounds a night. He knew, however, that this was but fitful enthusiasm, that his dramatic course was nearly run. We might not unfairly connect his resolve to withdraw with the success of Edmund Kean, whose hold upon the public was every day becoming firmer. The state of Kemble's affairs might fairly justify him in lingering on the stage, just as his sister had done, and certainly for at least four or five years more he might fairly count on earning a substantial income. But he made up his mind to take this step, which for the great actor is always invested with a painful formality. For the leading barrister, clergyman, or physician there is no such formal ceremonial of leave-taking: the player alone has to say farewell with a dismal solemnity.

In March, 1817, he went to Edinburgh to take leave of his Scotch friends, who deserve the credit of having always been the warmest and steadiest patrons of the Kemble family. The son of Mrs. Siddons had directed the theatre there with great spirit, and later a brother of John Kemble's was to hold the same office. Henry Siddons and his wife were supported by Scott and his friends with a heartiness and personal interest which recalls the old

relations between the theatres in German towns like Weimar, and its royal and noble patrons; and such cordial sympathy and direct exertion is a far more satisfactory guarantee for the success of the drama than the more vulgar notion of support—namely, paying at the doors. On this principle the bringing out of Miss Baillie's turgid *De Montfort* had become a sort of festival for Edinburgh. Kemble's relations with the genial Sheriff are pleasant to read of. The latter had many stories to tell of his stately friend, and owned that he was the only one who enticed him after reaching middle age into deep potations. Indeed, he said that Kemble used to swallow wine in pailfuls. He delighted in picturing "King John" seated on horseback and nervously enjoying a rough gallop, and would describe a scene when they were driven to a river's edge to avoid a bull who was pursuing them. "Come, King John," said Scott, "we must e'en take to the water." And Scott and his daughter did so. Kemble stood surveying the turgid stream. "The flood is angry, Sheriff," he said, gravely; "methinks I'll get me up into a tree." But the bull was approaching, and he had to follow the example of his friends. In his *Quarterly Review* article Scott gives with some

humour a characteristic account of a Royal Academy dinner, at which he found himself seated beside his friends. He describes the whole scene—the dignitaries assembled, the speaking, the enormous silver chandelier, a royal gift, which hung over the centre of the table. The poet and actor had this common bond of sympathy, the love of black-letter—the old plays—for which, like Garrick, Kemble had such a costly taste. They had passed to the discussion of a fanciful notion of Kemble's—a new reading of the part of Falstaff—in the midst of which came a crashing sound, and, to the great alarm of all, the huge silver chandelier was seen slowly descending. The chain did not break, though the links stretched. Every one was terror-stricken, but the mischief ended there. But Kemble was utterly unconcerned, and gravely rebuked his companion for not attending to his laborious explanation which the accident had not interrupted. This was highly characteristic.

At Edinburgh he gave a round of farewell performances. Scott thought he had never seen him play *Coriolanus* more finely. But on March the twenty-ninth he took leave of them appropriately in *Macbeth*. It was then thought worthy of remark that in this part he wore “a Highland dress,” like Macklin—a curious



indication of the state of theatrical costume. "He was delighted," says Scott, disguised as a *Quarterly Reviewer*, "when with our critical hands, which have plucked many a plume besides, we divested his bonnet of sundry huge bunches of black feathers which made it look like an undertaker's cushion, and replaced them with a single broad feather of an eagle sloping across his noble brow. He told us afterwards that the change to him was worth three distinct rounds of applause as he came forwards in this improved and more genuine head-gear." But a greater service was the writing of a Farewell Epilogue, so graceful, so poetical, and so different from the valedictory stuff usually put forward on such occasions, that I may be allowed to give the chief portion of it here:—

"As the worn war-horse, at the trumpet's sound,  
Erects his mane, and neighs and paws the ground,  
Disdains the ease his generous lord assigns,  
And longs to rush on the embattled lines,—  
So I, your plaudits ringing in my ear,  
Can scarce sustain to think our parting near;  
To think my scenic hour for ever past,  
And that these valued plaudits are my last!  
Why should we part, while still some powers remain,  
That in your service strive not yet in vain?  
Cannot high zeal the strength of youth supply,  
And sense of duty fire the fading eye?  
Ah, no! the taper wearing to its close  
Oft for a space in fitful lustre glows;

But all too soon the transient gleam is past,  
It cannot be renewed, and will not last.  
Even duty, zeal, and gratitude can wage  
But short-lived conflict with the frosts of age.  
Yes! it were poor, remembering what I was,  
To live a pensioner on your applause;  
To drain the dregs of your endurance dry,  
And take as alms the praise I once could buy,  
Till every sneering youth around inquires—  
“Is this the man who once could please our sires?”  
This must not be; and higher duties crave  
Some space between the theatre and the grave.  
That, like the Roman in the Capitol,  
I may adjust my mantle ere I fall.  
My life's brief act in public service flown,  
The last, the closing scene, must be my own.

Here, then, adieu! Well, yet some well-graced part  
May fix an ancient favourite in your heart,  
Not quite to be forgotten, even when  
You look on better actors, younger men;  
And if your bosoms own this kindly debt  
Of old remembrance, how shall mine forget!  
Oh, how forget! how oft I hither came  
In anxious hope; how oft returned with fame!  
How oft around your circle this weak hand  
Has waved immortal Shakspeare's magic wand,  
Till the full burst of inspiration came,  
And I have felt, and you have fanned the flame!  
By memory treasured, while his reign endures,  
Those hours must live, and all their charms are yours.

Oh, favour'd land! renowned for arts and arms,  
For manly talent, and for female charms,  
Could this full bosom prompt the sinking line,  
What fervent benedictions now were thine!  
But my last part is played, my knell is rung,  
When e'en your praise falls faltering from my tongue.

These are charming and genuine lines—melodious, and exhibiting the true touch of the enchanter of the North. Apart from the interest of the occasion, they can be read now with pleasure.\* He was agitated during its delivery, and sobs and tears showed how he had affected the audience. Imitating Garrick, he slowly retired up the stage, lingering, as if loth to take his departure. These theatrical leave-takings—which became very plentiful about this time—seem to have caught something from the atmosphere in which they took place. But Kemble must have felt the seriousness of the occasion as an anticipation of the greater parting from his profession, now impending.

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\* Had it been put into Kemble's hand only a few moments before the play began, he would have found no difficulty in delivering it—his powers of "getting by heart" being always prodigious. Michael Kelly gives an instance of this quickness, when Kemble learnt a prologue while waiting for dinner.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## RETIREMENT.

HE was now ready to close his career on a more important stage, and followed the actor's favourite practice of taking leave in a series of farewell performances; but a deal of false sentiment and truly theatrical emotions have been connected with these exhibitions, for which the incurable vanity of the profession is not a little accountable. From Garrick's time these leave-takings had increased enormously, and every second-rate actor had his last nights, his speech, his "voice broken with emotion," and lingering retirement up the stage. It is a pity that so touching a ceremony should have become vulgarized. It was reserved, however, for the late Mr. Charles Kean to introduce the fashion of frequent retirements and renewed farewells. No objection would of course be made to such leave-takings as that of Garrick, Kemble, or Siddons, who all three withdrew at the

proper time, and did not linger "drivelling shows" on the stage where their enfeebled faculties had long ceased to give pleasure. It might be worth inquiry how it is that this want of dignity is chiefly found in the musical profession, and the spectacle of dotage thrust on an audience, is less frequently witnessed in the theatre. The spectacle of "old Farren" may indeed be pointed to, who some years ago used to be pushed on the stage in a state of aged imbecility, and who, when the act was half over, generally lost his faculties, and stood a spectacle of drivelling helplessness; but on the whole such shows are happily very rarely furnished by actors of mark. Kemble obeyed the first symptoms of failing, and determined to withdraw when he could do so gracefully. The last time that he and Young played together in *Julius Cæsar*, Kemble, when the play was over, went into Young's dressing-room, and presented him with a few stage articles that he had worn, begging him to keep them in memory of their having fought together. "We've often had high words together on the stage," he said, "but never off." Young made an affectionate reply; on which Kemble was much affected, wrung his hand warmly, and left the room, saying—

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“For this present  
I would not, so with love I might entreat you,  
Be any further moved.” \*

These are gracious passages. Young always understood him, and would never accept the attitude of rivalry which some would force on him.

During the season, following the example of Garrick, he had given the whole round of his best characters: Pierre, Brutus, Cato, The Stranger, Lord Townly, King John, Penruddock, Hotspur, Hamlet, Zanga, Wolsey, Octavian, Posthumus, and Macbeth. The twenty-third of June, 1817, was fixed for the night of his last appearance. There was, however, one painful incident connected with these last performances—an ungracious act, considering what the occasion was. He played the unsuitable part of Sir Giles, and there were many present who were fresh from the almost demoniacal ferocity of Kean in the same character. The contrast between nature and truth on the one side, and study and correctness on the other, was too marked. There was loud disapprobation. The good humour of the audience was however restored when the Italian rope-dancer made her appearance! But Hazlitt describes the painful and degrading scene:—

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\* “Memoir of Charles Young.”

“Reluctance to speak on this subject has not decreased, the more we have thought upon it since. We have hardly ever experienced a more painful feeling than when, after the close of the play, the sanguine plaudits of Mr. Kemble’s friends, and the circular discharge of hisses from the back of the pit, that came ‘full volley home,’ the music struck up, the ropes were fixed, and Madame Sachi ran up from the stage to the two-shilling gallery, and then ran down again, as fast as her legs could carry her, amid the shouts of pit, boxes, and gallery!

“ ‘So fails, so languishes, and dies away  
All that this world is proud of. So  
Perish the roses and the crowns of kings,  
Sceptres and palms of all the mighty.’

“We have here marred some fine lines of Mr. Wordsworth on the instability of human greatness, but it is no matter: for he does not seem to understand the sentiment himself. Mr. Kemble, then, having been thrust into the part, as we suppose, against his will, ran the gauntlet of public opinion in it with a firmness and resignation worthy of a confessor. He did not once shrink from his duty, nor make one effort to redeem his reputation, by ‘affecting a virtue, when he knew he had it not.’ He seemed throughout to say to his instigators, ‘You have thrust me into this



part—help me out of it if you can; for you see I cannot help myself.’ We never saw signs of greater poverty, greater imbecility and decrepitude in Mr. Kemble, or in any other actor: it was Sir Giles in his dotage. It was all ‘Well, well,’ and, ‘If you like it, have it so,’ *an indifference and disdain of what was to happen, a nicety about his means, a coldness as to his ends, much gentility and little nature.* Was this Sir Giles Overreach? Nothing could be more quaint and out-of-the-way. Mr. Kemble wanted the part to come to him, for he would not go out of his way to the part.”

On the last night every box in the theatre was taken, the orchestra was fitted up as stalls: but the vast theatre, which quite dwarfed the one where Garrick made his adieus, was only partially filled.

“Mr. Kemble,” says his judicious critic, Hazlitt, who was present, “took his leave of the stage on Monday night in the character of Coriolanus. On his first coming forward to pronounce his farewell address, he was received with a shout like thunder: on his retiring after it, the applause was long before it subsided entirely away. There is something in these partings with old public favourites exceedingly affecting. They teach us the shortness of human

life, and the vanity of human pleasures. Our associations of admiration and delight with theatrical performers are among our earliest recollections—among our last regrets. They are links that connect the beginning and the end of life together; *their* bright and giddy career of popularity measures the arch that spans our brief existence. It is near twenty years ago since we first saw Mr. Kemble in the same character—yet how short the interval seems? The impression appears as distinct as if it were of yesterday. In fact, intellectual objects, in proportion as they are lasting, may be said to shorten life. Time has no effect upon them. The petty and the personal, that which appeals to our senses and our interests, is by degrees forgotten, and fades away into the distant obscurity of the past. The grand and the ideal, that which appeals to the imagination, can only perish with it, and remains with us, unimpaired in its lofty abstraction, from youth to age; as, wherever we go, we still see the same heavenly bodies shining over our heads. We forget numberless things that have happened to ourselves, one generation of follies after another; but not the first time of our seeing Mr. Kemble, nor shall we easily forget the last. Coriolanus, the character in which he took his leave of the

stage, was one of the first in which we remember to have seen him; and it was one in which we were not sorry to part with him, for we wished to see him appear like himself to the last. Nor was he wanting to himself on this occasion: he played the part as well as he ever did—with as much freshness and vigour. There was no abatement of spirit and energy—none of grace and dignity: his look, his action, his expression of the character, were the same as they ever were: they could not be finer.”

In the audience was seen Talma, the great French actor, with nearly every one of intellect and rank in London. It was admitted indeed that he never acted so superbly—nothing could have been more admirable than his choice of the character in which he wished to leave the last impression of himself on his friends, for it would be an impression of something gallant, chivalrous, and spirited. Such was more suitable than the guilty horrors of *Macbeth* and the sustained gloom of *Penruddock* or the dismal *Stranger*. It was thus that Garrick chose the vivacious *Don Felix*. Kemble seemed to put his whole soul into the part, and, it was noticed, seemed to cast away all unfavourable checks and reserves, as though there was no further need for husbanding his strength.

As he approached the last act a gloom seemed to settle down on the audience, and when at the end he came forward slowly to make his address,\* he was greeted with a shout like thunder of "No farewell!" It was long before he could obtain silence or could control his own feelings sufficiently to speak. At last he faltered out, "I have now appeared before you for the last time: this night closes my professional life." At this a tremendous tumult broke out, with cries of "No, no!" and after an interval he went on—

"I am so much agitated that I cannot express with any tolerable propriety what I wish to say. I feared indeed that I should not be able to take my leave of

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\* Mr. Boaden was present, and describes the scene after his own singular fashion. "I had secured," he says, "a seat in the orchestra, and being exactly below him, saw, and enjoyed the amazing power by which an actor is enabled to subdue even his nerves to the temporary command of the scene, and lay himself completely aside, to be resumed like a stage revival. I saw nothing that, by a glance or a tone, reminded you of his awful LAST." Hazlitt, though an ardent partisan of the new player Kean, whom he was exalting to the skies, was worked up to enthusiasm. It is curious to compare his official critique, written under this influence, in a sort of judicial mood, with his generous and enthusiastic review, written six years later for the *London Magazine*, on the death of Kemble, and when his admiration for Kean had cooled. There he does full justice to the great player, and speaks with a sort of rapture of this last and magnificent performance of *Coriolanus*.

you with sufficient fortitude—composure I mean—and had intended to withdraw myself from before you in silence; but I suffered myself to be persuaded that if it were only from old custom, some little parting word would be expected from me on this occasion. Ladies and gentlemen, I entreat you to believe that whatever abilities I have possessed, either as an actor in the performance of the characters allotted to me, or as a manager in endeavouring at a union of propriety and splendour in the representation of our best plays, and particularly those of the divine Shakspeare, I entreat you to believe that all my labours, all my studies, whatever they have been, have been made delightful to me by the approbation with which you have been pleased constantly to reward them.

“I beg you, ladies and gentlemen, to accept my thanks for the great kindness you have invariably shown me, from the first night I became a candidate for public favour down to this painful moment of my parting with you! I must take my leave at once. Ladies and gentlemen, I most respectfully bid you a long and an unwilling farewell.”

He was greatly agitated in parts, especially as he dwelt upon what he had done for Shakspeare. “I observed him narrowly,” says Boaden; “he evidently

regretted his art as much as his patrons." And it does seem surprising that both on this occasion, as on that of the complimentary dinner that followed, so much stress should have been laid on those processions and dresses, and scenic devices, which were certainly the smallest part of his merits. At the end he seemed to hurry over what he had to say, to be eager to finish, and withdrew with a long and lingering gaze, just as Garrick had done. Some one handed a wreath of laurel to Talma, to which was attached an inscription, bearing a request that Mr. Kemble would not retire, but would act, at least a few times in the year, so long as his strength would allow him. Kemble, however, had withdrawn; but the manager (Fawcett) coming out, assured them it should be his pride to present it to Mr. Kemble. But in the green-room he received an unexpected shape of homage, for all his brother artists begged from him the various articles of his theatrical dress, as memorials. Mathews obtained his sandals; Miss Bristow his pocket-handkerchief; and, when he at last withdrew from the theatre, he found the entrances lined with all the assistants and supernumeraries waiting to give him a last greeting. Garrick spoke of his parting as "awful;" and it may be conceived that the feelings







*Farewell Dinner*  
*to*  
*J. P. Kemble Esq.*  
*on his retirement from the Stage.*

ADMIT

*Kentarius.*

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at such a moment must be strongly compounded. For beside the regret of parting, there is the sacrifice, the loss of homage, applause, and those intoxicating scenes of triumph which, where a great actor is concerned, can have nothing to rival them.

It was then determined to pay him the unusual compliment of giving him a farewell dinner. A committee was formed, money was subscribed, and a testimonial, in the shape of a handsome vase, was designed by no less an artist than Flaxman, to be presented to him. Even a medal was struck to commemorate the occasion. On the morning of June 27th, the day fixed for the banquet, a deputation from the Drury Lane comedians waited on him, to offer their regrets and sympathy. Rae, a good sound actor, was spokesman, who justly reminded Kemble that it was at Drury Lane he had won all his fame. Kemble acknowledged these civilities "cordially and impressively."

The dinner was given at the Freemasons' Tavern; and looking to the roll of titled and distinguished persons that attended, it must be owned that it was the most brilliant compliment of the kind ever paid to an actor. In the ranks were to be found Lord Holland, who was in the chair; the Duke of Bedford, Marquises of Lansdowne, Tavistock, Worcester, and

Abercorn, Earls of Carlisle, Blessington, Essex, Egremont, Fife, with many more of the nobility. The mixture of names distinguished in politics, literature, and art, is highly characteristic. There were Canning, Fiore, Croker, Crabbe, Burney; Colonels Berkeley and O'Kelly — congenial pair — Lawrence, Shee, Smirke, Turner, Heber, Haydon, Moore, Rogers, Macready, and Talma. The vase was unfinished, so no more than a drawing and cast could be exhibited. The inscription, furnished by Poole, of "Paul Pry" memory, was scarcely judicious in its terms; and, though allowance should, of course, be made for the "effusion" of the moment, it could have been challenged for much of its panegyric:—

TO JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE,

On his retirement from the Stage,

Of which for thirty-four years he has been the Ornament and Pride,

Which, to his Learning, Taste, and Genius

Is indebted for its present state of refinement :

Which, under his auspices, and aided by his unrivalled labours (most worthily devoted to the

LEGITIMATE DRAMA,

And more particularly the

GLORY OF SHAKSPEARE),

Has attained to a degree of Splendour and Propriety before unknown, and which from his high character has acquired an increase of Honour and Dignity,

THIS VASE,

By a numerous assembly of his admirers, was presented

Through the hands of the President,

HENRY RICHARD VASSALL, LORD HOLLAND,

xxvii June, 1817.

"More is thy due than more than all can pay."

It was surely ludicrous to boast of the "present state of refinement of the stage;" and, with the recollection of Garrick and his unrivalled companions still fresh, to talk of a "propriety" that had been before unknown. Many must have smiled as they thought of the horses and other animals that had been admitted behind the scenes, of the combats, the stormings of castles, and the like. The processions and dresses which set off Shakspeare were a more legitimate theme of commendation; but there was almost a sort of irony in such praise.\*

In his speech, Lord Holland dwelt on the same theme, and complimented the guest on his doing more for the permanent prosperity of the stage "by collateral means"—such was the delicate phrase—and, consequently, for the fame of its votaries, than any one who had gone before him. As long as the British Theatre existed, the result of his learning and industry would be seen in the "propriety" of scenic decorations and costumes. This surely was the first

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\* Similar praises were lavished on Mr. C. Kean at a complimentary dinner of the same nature; and two volumes were written to set forth the triumphs of upholstery, canvas, and woodwork, and "the hundred carpenters" whose services were necessary to "set" a particular scene.

symptom of the steady decay that has set in ever since. It can be traced in the clearest manner ; and this development of "propriety" led to the antiquarian revivals of Charles Kemble, to the more judicious "pomps and shows" of Macready ; to the panoramic exhibitions of Mr. Charles Kean, where poor Shakespeare, like the Tarpeian Maid, lay crushed under a load of ornaments ; and to the realism and sensation of Mr. Boucicault. The whole has at last terminated in the present satiety and exhaustion.

Young then recited an ode, written by Campbell for the occasion, in which there were some spirited lines, but also such oddities as "*Siddons' auxiliary power :*"—

"Pride of the British stage,  
 A long and last adieu!  
 Whose image brought th' heroic ago  
 Reviv'd to fancy's view.  
 Like fields refreshed with dewy light,  
 When the sun smiles his last,  
 Thy parting presence makes more bright  
 Our memory of the past.  
 And memory conjures feelings up  
 That wine or music need not swell,  
 As high we lift the festive cup  
 To Kemble, fare thee well!

His was the spell o'er hearts  
 That only acting lends,

The youngest of the sister arts,  
 Where all their beauty blends ;  
 For Poetry can ill express  
 Full many a line of thought sublime,  
 And Painting, mute and motionless,  
 Steals but one partial glance from time ;  
 But by the mighty actor brought,  
 Illusion's wedded triumphs come,  
 Verse ceases to be airy thought,  
 And Sculpture to be dumb !

Time may again revive,  
 But ne'er efface, the charm,  
 When Cato spoke in him alive,  
 Or Hotspur kindled warm.

What soul was not resigned entire  
 To the deep sorrows of the Moor ?  
 What English heart was not on fire  
 With him at Agincour ?

And yet a majesty possess'd  
 His transport's most impetuous tone,  
 And to each passion of his breast  
 The Graces gave the zone.

\* \* \* \*

Had Shakspeare's self amidst you been,  
 Friends, he had seen you melt,  
 And triumphed to have seen.

Kemble acknowledged all this homage happily enough, though he commenced with the now well-worn formula "Unused as I am to extemporaneous public speaking." He boasted that the shape of compliment with which they had honoured him had never been extended to any of his predecessors. "The

manner in which you have been so kindly good as to show your solicitude that my performances may be handed down to—posterity is too proud a word—but that the memory of them should live after me, is too flattering to my feelings not to affect my heart most deeply.”

Talma wound up the proceedings with a happy compliment in English, on the part of the French players.

Thus fitly closed the dramatic career of this great English actor.



## CHAPTER XV.

## KEMBLE'S DEATH.

THUS out of harness, he resolved to go and live abroad, chiefly on account of his health. He had long suffered from an asthmatic complaint, and a sort of sepulchral huskiness, which distinguished his playing, and furnished amusement to his satirists, was to be accounted for by this physical infirmity. His admirers, in their turn, traced many beauties of his playing—that reserving of himself—the apparent languor relieved by vigorous and surprising bursts—to the same cause. It is certain that the contrast between his dramatic power and the faintness of the tone in which it was expressed had a certain charm of surprise. This peculiar tone, in passages of tenderness, was held to add to the effect.

Another reason for his wishing to live abroad was the amount of his income, which, after his long service, was very moderate, though sufficient, being chiefly dependent on a charge of a thousand a year,

paid to him by some parties to whom he had lent all his savings. The theatre would seem to have returned him little or nothing.

He, with Mrs. Kemble, first settled at Toulouse, where they remained several years. They soon made friends, and were welcomed by the provincial society. But he discovered that the asthma from which he suffered began to grow worse, and some of his friends seemed to think that this was connected with the cessation of his nightly practice on the stage. A more probable explanation would be the absence of occupation, the trying character of a French winter, and advancing years. In 1820, when he had been away nearly three years, he wrote to his brother in a pleasant tone, and indeed his affection for Charles was one of the few interesting features in his rather austere nature. Yet there is the old grim and laborious gaiety in the opening. "Come, Charles, my good fellow," he wrote, "take courage: *look your pen and ink boldly in the face*, and let me know a little how you are." He then proceeded to give a little picture of the state of society at Toulouse; how, since the death of the Duc de Berri, it had been distracted with divisions, and how, owing to the violence of party spirit, there was no place for an indifferent

spectator. The unhappy English who wished to keep neutral were disliked by all. His general health was excellent, considering the severity of the winter; he never had coughs, and the spitting of blood and gout was so slight that he "made a pish!" at such afflictions. He proposed to pass the next winter in Italy, so as to patch up his "crazy constitution," and after that would return home, well or ill, to England, to his friends and books. "Your youth and activity," he added, "make you smile, maybe, at my tranquil projects and designs." He then hints at another substantial reason for his departure. Toulouse was much dearer than he had been led to suppose.

"We still want," wrote Hazlitt, regretfully, "to see tragedy, 'turreted, crowned, and crested, with its front gilt and blood-stained,' stooping from the skies (not raised from the earth) as it did in the person of John Kemble. He is now quaffing health and burgundy in the south of France. He perhaps finds the air that blows from the 'vine-covered hills' wholesomer than that of a crowded house; and the lengthened murmurs of the Mediterranean shore more soothing to the soul than the deep thunders of the pit. Or does he sometimes recline his lofty, laurelled head upon the sea-beat beach, and unlocking the

cells of memory, listen to the rolling Pæans, the loud never-to-be-forgotten plaudits of enraptured multitudes, that mingle with the music of the waves—

And murmur as the ocean murmurs near ?

Or does he still ‘sigh his soul towards England’ and the busy hum of Covent Garden? If we thought so (but that we dread all returns from Elba), we would say to him, ‘Come back, and once more bid Britannia rival old Greece and Rome!’”

He was soon back in London once more. Hazlitt, however, who saw him, noticed a prodigious change, and gives a rather affecting picture of the great actor.\*

“His face,” he said, “was as fine and noble as ever, but he sat in a large arm-chair bent down, dispirited, and lethargic. He spoke no word, but he sighed heavily, and after drowsing thus for a time he went away.”

After remaining a short time he set out for Switzerland, and settled at Lausanne in a charming villa just outside the town, and bearing the pleasant name of Beausite. From the windows there was a grand view

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\* *London Review*, 1823.

of the mountains, and there with his garden and his books he seems to have spent some happy days. Travellers and old friends came and were made welcome; and it was one of the former who reported to Mr. Rogers a grotesque instance of the actor's fretfulness—his growing impatient at the regular morning remark, "How does Mont Blanc look this morning?" This was actually set down to a jealousy of the great mountain! It was in truth rather a protest against the tedious banalities of the average tourist. There too he received a visit from his sister Mrs. Siddons.

"Here we are," wrote her daughter, on July 13th, 1821, "without accident, seated in this most comfortable house (such another, I suppose, there is not in the canton), in the midst of this divine scenery. I do not yet think it real—no more, I believe, does my mother; but she is well, and delighted to see her brother. Both he and Mrs. Kemble seem as perfectly happy as I ever saw two human beings. They received us most kindly. Their situation is a blessed one. The house has been built only five years, and by a person who has been in England, and therefore has some faint notions of comfort. It overlooks the lake, and has fine views in every direction. My mother is dying to see Chamouny, but every one

assures her it would be next to impossible for her, and that the fatigue would prevent her enjoying it. So I believe we are all to make a little tour to Berne."

And again :—

"Our tour answered perfectly as far as it went. The weather at first was beautiful, but it changed, and set in so determinedly for rain, that we cut it short, and came back four days sooner than we intended. It is quite useless to attempt describing the beauties of the scenery. My uncle says, that what we saw is far finer than the tour to Chamouny, which I think we shall not now see, or much regret, having eaten of chamois, crossed a lake, mounted a glacier with two men cutting steps in the ice with a hatchet, and done most of the surprising things that travellers boast of. My mother bore all the fatigues much more wonderfully than any of us." He must have smiled when he heard of a legacy to his sister from the widow of Garrick. She made the following bequest to the great actress, in a codicil to her will, dated August 15, 1822 :—

"I give to Mrs. Siddons a pair of gloves which were Shakspeare's, and were presented by one of his family to my late dear husband, during the jubilee at Stratford-upon Avon."

Information of the above reached Mrs. Siddons, with this note from Mrs. Garrick's executors:—

"5, Adelphi Terrace, Oct. 30, 1822.

"MADAM,—

"We beg leave to transmit to you the above extract from a codicil to Mrs. Garrick's will, and to acquaint you that we will have the honour of waiting on you, for the purpose of delivering the relic therein mentioned, whenever you may be so good as to inform us that it may be convenient to you to receive our visit.

"We remain, with much respect,

"Madam,

"Your most obedient humble servants,

"THOS. RACKET, G. F. BELTZ,

"*Executors.*

"P.S. We beg leave to mention, that on Saturday next we shall be absent from town, and that we shall leave town for a few days on Wednesday next.

"Mrs. Siddons."

But presently Kemble was to learn the death of his partner Harris, which threw a responsibility on him, as regards the theatre, very undesirable for one so far away. This led him to take the step of making over



to his brother Charles his share in the undertaking—a rather disastrous finale to his theatrical speculations. And though the substantial portion of the money he had sunk in it had been a present, and though little or no profit was being made, it was still a generous gift. For it might readily be supposed that tact and spirit would have made the business remunerative. Garrick had taken a share in Drury Lane when its fortunes were at a far lower ebb. But speculators then, as now, took no account of the upas tree that was destroying the drama; and without wishing to be fanciful, we might count as two of its fatal boughs monster houses and free trade in playhouses. Charles Kemble, when he gratefully received this donation, did not reckon the impossibility of fighting against such difficulties; yet otherwise everything was favourable. Though at this distance of time we might suppose that the drama must have suffered grievously by the loss of two such players as Kemble and his sister, yet, as Dr. Doran has pointed out, there were players like Young, Macready, Edmund Kean, Charles Kemble, and Miss O'Neil—all in their prime—to support the glories of the English stage.

When he thought over the difficulties of arranging this matter, his heart turned back to an old friendship, which had begun forty years before with almost

a romantic tenderness, but which had since been cooled by jealousies and misunderstanding. Those who think of Kemble as "Black Jack," as haughty, hard, and repelling, may read the following letter to Mrs. Inchbald,\* which, though short, is soft and affectionate:—

"Know, dear Muse,

'Tis our fast intent  
To shape all cares and business for an age,  
Conferring them on younger strength.

In plain prose, I have assigned over my sixth part of the property in absolute fee to my brother Charles, and God give him good wit. When I left you before, dearest, it was to visit Spain, and you managed for me in my absence; now, I think, I shall make out my tour to Italy and end perhaps like an old Roman."

It was here that the former Guardsman and dandy of the Regency, Mr. Gronow, met him at a dinner at the Capels, and that shrewd observer bore testimony to Kemble's agreeable qualities. He noticed particularly his "vein of dry humour, which was contrasted with his sepulchral voice and serious manner." It was at this time too that another matter of business was arranged for him in a manner that he must have

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\* Boaden's "Life of Inchbald."

felt highly complimentary. Like Garrick, he had gathered a fine collection of old plays, chiefly in quarto, as well as a library which exhibited both taste and culture in the selection. These he could not have with him when abroad, and it seemed the best course that they should be sold. The money, too, would add to the comforts of his old age. An offer of the quarto plays was made to the Duke of Devonshire, a well known virtuoso, Kemble proposing that an annuity of 200*l.* for his own life should be the price. Considering the actor's age and state of health this seemed a good bargain for the Duke, and some of Kemble's friends interfered and suggested that Mrs. Kemble's life should be included. Kemble accordingly wrote to the Duke, offering to abide by his original offer, but urging what had been suggested by his friends. The Duke very handsomely proposed 2000*l.* down, which was gratefully accepted. Had he consented to give the annuity to Mrs. Kemble, the quarto plays would have been a costly addition to his library, and would have been purchased at nearly 5000*l.* Kemble's library was also disposed of, and brought the handsome sum of 2271*l.* Thus his good taste had brought a seasonable increase to his income of over 300*l.* a year.

He now determined to carry out a long-talked-of plan of visiting Italy. At Milan he again fell in with his friends the Gronows, and stayed at the same hotel.

All that the dandy who recalled so many lively stories of Lord Alvanley and other fashionable men can recal of Mr. Kemble's conversation, is his remark on entering the Scala Theatre, "How like old Drury!" More characteristic, however, was the actor's criticism of Conway, whom he criticised with a severity that was almost Johnsonian. Some one asked him, was Mr. Conway a good actor? "Mr. Conway, sir," was the grave answer, "is a very tall young man." "But what do you *think* of him?" "I think Mr. Conway is a very tall young man." Later he became really witty on the same subject. He had made the true observation that the worst professional is superior to the best amateur. When Lord Blessington, a little nettled at what reflected on his own histrionic claims, asked him if he meant that Conway was a better player than he (Lord Blessington) was. "Conway," said Kemble, in his most sepulchral manner, "*is a very strong exception.*"\*

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\* Kemble's remark as to the inferiority of amateurs is true in its

This Italian tour proved to be an unfortunate expedition. The cold winter at Rome inflamed all his disorders, and he had to hurry back to Lausanne. There his health gradually decayed; yet his closing days were soothed by the regard and attention of a host of friends, English as well as native. He had only returned a few weeks when the end came on, and this "well graced actor" had to quit the scene.

On February 19, 1823, he had dined out, and it was remarked that he was in excellent spirits.\* On

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strictest sense. The worst professional—who knows the business of the stage—is more of an *actor* than a perfect genius who is untrained. The want of this acquaintance absolutely destroys the effect of great talents; the management of the voice, the expression, the limbs, are mechanical arts, but are absolutely essential. This sort of training—save as regards the vulgar "stage-walk," so often ridiculed—is entirely overlooked. Kemble's remark has been given in another shape: "that no amateur was worth eighteen shillings a week," or some such sum. A pendant for which may be found in the exclamation of another great actor, invited to private theatricals at some great house. He had sat uninterested for a long time, when some one entered and gave a message. "Ah!" he said, eagerly, "*there's a real actor.*" It was some supernumerary who had been engaged.

\* This account is taken from the article before alluded to, in the "Annual Biography," and which is more full and minute than that of Boaden.

the next evening a few friends came to take tea with him, with whom he had his favourite rubber of whist. On the Sunday following he was out for two hours in his garden, and seemed in good health. On the Monday morning he was sitting with Mrs. Kemble reading a newspaper, when the paper fell from his hand. His wife came rushing to him, and his words to her—which proved to be his last words—were to bid her not to be alarmed. Doctor Schole was sent for; but one stroke after another seized him, and lingering a day, he died on February 20th, 1823. His excellent wife, who was deeply attached to him, was seized with a sort of nervous fever from the shock, which rendered her helpless.

In that little settlement he was deeply regretted, as indeed was proved by the remarkable regret exhibited on the news of his death. The funeral took place on Saturday, March 1st, and was attended by all the resident English and many Swiss. The Dean of Raphoe read the Service at the house, and Mr. Cheeseborough, the Lausanne chaplain, officiated at the grave. The grave was made in a piece of ground adjoining the public cemetery on the Berne Road, where were interred Mr. Capel and several English; and there a simple stone, within a railing, is

shown to visitors as the grave of JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE.

Mr. Cheeseborough wrote home the sad tidings, at Mrs. Kemble's request, who was nervously anxious as to how the news was to be broken to Mrs. Siddons. The same clergyman wrote over an account of his religious state:—

“I was with him during the greater part of his last hours, and at the final close: and on commending his soul to His gracious keeping whose blood and mediatorial power could alone present it spotless before God, I could not avoid secretly exclaiming, ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his.’”

Considering that Kemble was cut off suddenly, and never spoke, and, as happens in such cases, could not have understood, we might accept, but scarcely pray for such an end. Mr. Cheeseborough also claimed him as “one of his little flock,” on which Boaden makes the following singular comment, by way of explaining Kemble's religious views.

“He avoided the indecency of disclaiming the mode of religion followed by his father, and looked only to his vital character. *If the most enlarged charity towards all men be foolishness to the Catholic*, I then from



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his repeated declarations pronounce Mr. Kemble to have been a Protestant."

A discussion on such a point would be inappropriate here; but it may be simply remarked that neither the accuracy of the clergyman nor the logic of Mr. Boaden is satisfactory. We now turn to follow the short course that remains of his sister's life.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE NUNEHAM LETTERS.

**A**MONG Mrs. Siddons's warmest friends, and the most ready to console her under this heavy trial, were Lord and Lady Harcourt. Her intimacy with these noble persons was of the most familiar and affectionate character, and she was always a welcome guest at Nuneham, their country seat. The letters she wrote to these friends are, like all her letters, most agreeable and entertaining. But where her affections entered there was always an indescribable charm of confidence, a warmth and candour which contrasts surprisingly with her style of communicating with ordinary friends and acquaintances. It will be seen also with what perfect equality she approaches those who were so much her superiors in rank; and where others are often familiar and obsequious by turns, this great artist, without effort or loss of self-respect, calmly reached the level which she felt that friendship and her own gifts entitled her to claim.

Lord Harcourt, with all his partiality, kept his judgment free, and in a passage which Mr. Cunningham has given in his edition of Walpole's Letters, affected to prefer Mrs. Pritchard:—"To say that Mrs. Siddons, in one word, is superior to Mrs. Pritchard in *Lady Macbeth* would be talking nonsense, because I don't think that possible; but on the other hand, I will not say with those impartial judges Mr. Whitehead and Miss Fanquier, that she does not play nearly as well. . . . That she has much more expression of countenance, and can assume parts with a spirit, cannot be denied; but that she wants the dignity and, above all, the unequalled compass and melody of Mrs. Pritchard. . . . Her 'Are you a man?' and in the Banquet Scene, I thought her inferior to Mrs. Pritchard; and for the parts spoken at a great distance her voice wanted power. . . . The sigh was not so horrid, nor was the voice so sleepy, nor yet quite so articulate, as Mrs. Pritchard's."

These letters, it would seem, were laid before Mr. Campbell, but, as in the case of so many other letters offered to him, he found nothing in them "that would interest the general reader." The general reader, after perusing them, will, I venture to say, be of a

different opinion, and hold that they are graceful, and also affectionate and entertaining :\*—

“MY DEAR LORD,—I do myself the pleasure to inform you that I shall have the happiness—no, that’s not expressive of what I mean—I mean to say the honour and glory of obeying the commands of our good and gracious Queen next Wednesday, for which triumph I can never enough thank my charming Lady Harcourt ; and if you would both do me the honour to drink your tea in Gower Street next Sunday, you would greatly add to the favours you have already conferred on,—My lord, your lordship’s most grateful and affectionate humble servant,

“S. SIDDONS.”

“Gower Street, Bedford Square.”  
(1785.)

Thus it will be seen she was indebted to these friends for a mark of Court favour.

“MY DEAR LORD,—I return you many thanks for

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\* I am enabled to lay them before the reader through the kindness of Mr. E. Harcourt, the present representative of the Harcourt family.

the favour of your book, and hope you will not find it the worse for your kindness. I shall not, I fear, be able to avail myself of it, for my voice will not be strong enough to venture unaccompanied, and I think an instrument would entirely destroy the elegant simplicity of the idea.—I have the honour to be your lordship's most obliged and affectionate,

“S. SIDDONS.”

(1785.)

“MY DEAR LORD HARCOURT,—I return your box, with a thousand thanks for the honour of all your very kind attentions to me ; and yet, do you know, that at the moment I feel deeply sensible of all your goodness, I am going to ask *more* favours of you. I will begin with presenting my husband's best respects, who, with me, requests that you will do us the honour to eat a family dinner with us when Lady Harcourt is so good as to name a day—‘she hath my letter for the purpose.’ Secondly and lastly, I entreat that you will remember you once thought us worthy of possessing a resemblance of you, and were so good as to say you would bestow a print on us ; we have sought the world over and there is not one to be found, I fear *you* have none either, as I think you are

not apt to *forget*. Now, if that should be the case, it would make me ample amends for the time gone by if you would give me a picture of yourself the size that Lady Harcourt will be. I cannot describe the gratification it would be to have you *set* TOGETHER, and be able to carry two people always about with me for whom I have so great a degree of love and veneration. However, though I can't *describe*, you will understand what *kind* of pleasure it is I mean, and though I blush to make a request that will give you so much trouble to comply with, yet when I remember your goodness, I live in hopes that you will not deny me.—I have the honour to be your lordship's most obliged and affectionate servant,

“S. SIDDONS.”

(1787.)

“MY DEAR LORD,—If anything could have given me new life, your kind note would have restored me, but I have been so ill with my cold ever since Wednesday that even the eulogiums so *charmingly* bestowed on my *beauty* wont do. ‘Can flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death?’ I hope you and dear Lady Harcourt do not suffer from this severe weather. As to Mr. Haggitt, he's in *love*, which is of ‘so flood-

gate and o'erbearing nature' that all other sensations are swallow'd up in that, or more properly overwhelmed by it. My fingers are frozen, and my pen, which might as well be called a *stick*, makes my writing almost as unintelligible as that of a certain lady whom I dare not presume to name. I hope in God you will continue to think me handsome a good while, and *never cease* to regard with kindness, indulgence, and the honour of your friendship,—My dear lord, your very affectionate and faithful servant,

“S. SIDDONS.”

“MY DEAR LORD,—Though forbid the pleasure of seeing you again, I am sincerely happy in being enabled to congratulate you and dear Lady Harcourt on all the favourable circumstances, private and public, that have occurred since I had the honour of seeing you. I cannot tell you how sorry I am to leave Nuneham, or rather to leave you and Lady Harcourt, for though I think the situation as beautiful as it can be, I feel that *place* has less to do with my happiness than I could imagine, for since you and Mr. Siddons have left me to contemplate its beauties accompanied only by Maria, I heartily wish myself even in London, which I should at all times detest



but for the friends I see there ; my spirits are not equal to, or my internal resources are too few, for a life of solitude. Yesterday we drank tea with Mrs. Cowdon and Miss Douglas. Mrs. Cowdon's countenance would do one much good, I should think, when a vexation in painting or modelling, for instance, had occurred, it is so calm and tranquillizing, I dare say an exact counterpart of the quiet *within*. I believe the good soul, next her son, loves you the best ; *that you will not believe*—it is nevertheless very true. I have employed all this dismal day in devising little comforts for my next summer's residence here, and in finishing my model ; and will you, my dear lord, allow it the honour of your protection till I can find some means of having it conveyed to town ? In all events, you will find the poor little head standing on your table, and your benevolent heart will not suffer you to turn the inoffensive creature out of doors, even though you felt less regard than I flatter myself you do feel for the artist who has presumed upon your goodness to place it there. God bless you, my dear Lord Harcourt ! and grant that we may all meet in health and comfort. I can never be sufficiently thankful for the large share I have enjoyed this summer. Remember me very kindly to dear Mr.

Haggitt when you write to and see him. Accept a thousand thanks, and offer them to my dear Lady H., for all your neighbourly and kind attention to us, and *believe me, I beg of you, my dear lord*—Your very truly affectionate and faithful

“S. SIDDONS.

“I was so lame with modelling that I was forced to turn back when on my way to see the bonfire in the park. I have taken the liberty to trouble you for *many* covers, but alas! I shall not soon trouble you again, *more pity.*”

“Monday Morning.

“MY DEAR LORD,—It is easier for you to conceive than for me to express my surprise and grief at the melancholy news you send me, nor need I tell you, how sincerely I sympathize with you in a loss which you must feel even more poignantly than myself; for truly the longer one knew those virtues and that exalted genius the more one must have revered and loved their dear possessor; but he is gone to receive his rich reward, and I am one of those (whether rationally or not, yet surely innocently) who look forward to the hope of meeting those I love in a better world as one of the rewards for having struggled with reasonable decency through this. Let

us endeavour to console ourselves with this delightful expectation, and in the hope that his pure spirit went into the bosom of its great Creator without much pain at its departure hence. ‘Oh, may *my* death be that of the righteous, and my last end be like his.’— I have the honour to be, my dear Lord Harcourt, your very affectionate and faithful servant,

“S. SIDDONS.

“I hope my dear Lady Harcourt is well.”

(1797.)

The letters to Lady Harcourt are much more free in tone and confidential. The reader who has followed Mrs. Siddons’s life with me so far will be able to understand the various allusions.

“Gower Street, Sept. 26th, 1784.

“Was there ever such stupidity? Good God! if I had but called at the lodge—well, I deserve my disappointment; but I knew, my dear Lady Harcourt, the occasion that *must* call you away, and was not certain how long the etiquette of Court might detain you; so that, after some vexation, and then comfort, in the hope of catching you for a moment in town, I proceeded (saying these things are unavoidable, and, according to your *admired* example, making the best

of things) on my journey home. I called at Harcourt House the next day, but think on my disappointment when the porter told me his lord and lady were gone out of town. I lifted up my hands and eyes, you know how; my lord too can guess, who does not disdain a little fidget any more than myself, you know. I am in luck, says I, and posted home to write to you for consolation in my distress; a bad headache came on, and luckily prevented your being teased with my complaints. Presently your very dear and kind letter was put into my hand, which did me infinitely more good than all the salts, sal volatile, &c., in London could have done. How shall I thank you for it, my dear Lady Harcourt? In short, I cannot find words to thank you as I ought and as I wish; to *deserve* the regard of such people is justly called the height of human glory. I feel that I do *not* deserve it, the more merit is in your charity. I will, however, try not to *dishonour* your kindness. Your goodness to my dear Fanny I never will or can forget. If you knew her as I do you would be prouder of your benevolence to her than common objects can inspire you with. She is an invaluable creature, though I say it who am her sister. I cannot, my dear Lady Harcourt, resolve one of your propositions,

except that we are all well, that I am in a great hurry, as usual, and think I shall play next week, but what character I do not know. I have a vast deal of news for you when you come to town. I shall seize the first moment to pay my respects to you. Mr. S. and Miss K. unite in thanks and respectful compliments to you and my lord, to whom I beg mine, and also that you will believe me, my dearest Lady Harcourt, unalterably, your most affectionate and grateful,

“S. SIDDONS.”

“Saturday.

“MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—Forgive me if I intrude upon the sacredness of your sorrow, and let the sincerity with which I loved and honoured the dear departed object of it, and the love and unvarying affection which to my latest moment I must ever feel for you, allow me the mournful privilege of participating in your grief. I will not attempt to offer you any consolation, to the great and only source of comfort I can alone commend you in my prayer; and am, my dear Lady Harcourt, your sincerely afflicted and affectionate servant,

“S. SIDDONS.”

“MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—Now that I can

sit down in some hopes of being restored to health and comfort, I take the first leisure moment to write to you. I have been extremely ill indeed ever since I received the honour of your very kind letter, but Dr. Reynolds has prescribed so happily for me, that within this fortnight I am a new creature. It is impossible I suppose to give you any account of the Royal Family that you have not already heard. The King and Queen have done me the honour to be very gracious to me, and to little George. Her Majesty told me the other day that he was a very fine little boy; and so civil. They saw him several times with his maid, for *I* did not take him on the esplanade, when their Majesties were likely to be there, for fear his spirits should have grown boisterous, except when we went to bathe in the morning, and the Queen was never on the walk at those times. How it rejoices one's heart to see the King so well. I never saw him look so handsome in my life, and the Queen is absolutely fat. In short, they all look as well and as happy as possible. Long, long may their happiness continue!

“I had the pleasure of seeing my dear Mr. Mason at Sheffield, and went and spent a day at his beautiful little paradise—though I loved *him*, and venerated his

*genius before* as much as possible, my love and admiration is wonderfully increased since my having seen him *domesticated*, as I may call it. It is impossible to describe the delight it gives one, and the good it does one to hear and see that severe countenance and voice grow instantly benign and melodious at the sight of any of his poor neighbours or domestics. He really talks to them with the tenderness and good humour of a kind and sensible father. The housekeeper almost made me envy *her* situation—she made me think it must be the nearest approach to the mansions of the blessed to dwell under his roof; and she thanked God for the preservation of his health with so much fervour that I joined in her petition for the *continuance* of this blessing to her and many others, almost as heartily as she herself could do. Then the good man took us into his church, which is characteristic of himself, and wears an air of simple dignity. It was not Sunday, yet many people were assembled to hear the little children of the parish sing some poetry which he has, with his usual exquisite taste, collected from the Psalms, and adapted to elegant music of different composers. This was altogether too much and too fine a *sort* of pleasure to enjoy long; it overflowed at my eyes; but a few moments like



these convince one very forcibly there *is* a state of happiness in store for us which it 'hath not entered the heart of man to conceive.' I hope to see him again when I have the happiness of seeing you and dear Lord Harcourt. I expect every day to hear that among other dignities which the King daily confers (nay, I shall not be satisfied if it is not so), his lordship will receive the greatest that can be conferred on him. State and splendour *should* attend on such virtues and graces as those of my most honoured and beloved friends, but it is impossible that any earthly dignity should increase the esteem and affection of their most obliged, and ever faithful servant,

"S. SIDDONS."

"Weymouth, August 11th, 1789.

"Mr. Siddons begs his respects, and we offer kind compliments to Mr. Haggitt. I am going to Exeter, where I shall be about five weeks, to act a few nights, and then I have done with tragedy for a long, long time."

"Sandgate, near Folkestone, Kent,

August 2nd.

"MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—After so long a silence, your good nature will exalt itself to bear a long letter full of egotism, and I will begin with

Streatham, where you may remember to have heard me talk of going with no great degree of pleasurable expectation, supposing it impossible that I should ever feel much more for Mrs. P. than admiration of her talents; but after having very unexpectedly stayed there more than three weeks, during which time every moment gave me fresh instances of unremitting kindness and attention to me, and indeed a very extraordinary degree of benevolence and forbearance towards those who have not deserved much levity at her hands (and it is wonderful how many there are of that description), I left them with great regret, and between their very great kindness, their wit, and their music, they have made me love, esteem, and admire them very much. In a few days I set out with Mr. S., Miss Wynn, and her brother for Calais, and after a very rough passage of little more than two hours arrived at Calais, and found my dear girls quite well and improved in their persons, and (I am told in the French) I was very much struck with the difference of objects and customs, when I reflected how small a space divides one nation from the other, like true ENGLISH. We saw all we could, and I thought of my dear Lord Harcourt, though not *with* him in their churches. I own (though I blame

myself at the same time for it), I was disgusted with all the pomp and magnificence of them, when I saw the priests 'playing such fantastic tricks before high heaven as (I think must) make the angels weep,' and the people gabbling over their prayers, even in the *act of Gaping*, to have it over as quick as might be. Alas, said I to myself, in the pitifulness and perhaps *vanity* of my heart, how sorry I am for these poor deluded people, and how much more worthy the Deity ('who does prefer before all *TEMPLES* the upright *heart* and pure') are the sublime and simple forms of *our* religion. Indeed, my dear Madam, I am better satisfied with the ideas and feelings that have been excited in my heart, in *your* garden at *Nuneham*, than ever I have been in those fine gewgaw places, and believe Mr. Haggitt, by his plain and sensible sermons, has done more good than a legion of these priests would do if they were to live to the age of Methusalem. I am willing to own that all this may be prejudice, and that *we* may not *mean* better than our *neighbours*, but *fire* shall not burn my opinion out of me, and so *God mend all*. Now, to turn to our *great selves*. We took our little folks to Lisle; it is a very fine town, and though I know nothing of the language, the acting was so really good that it gave me very great pleasure.

The language of true genius, like that of Nature, is intelligible to all. We stayed there a few days, and you would have laughed to have seen my amazement at the valet of the inn assisting the *femme de chambre* in the making of our beds. The *beds* are the best I ever slept upon, but the valet's kind offices I could always, I think, dispense with, good heavens! Well, we returned to Calais, where I would have stayed a few months, and have employed myself in acquiring a few French phrases with the dear children if Mrs. Temple would have taken me in; but she said she had not room to accommodate me, and I unwillingly gave up the point. In a day or two we set sail, after seeing the civic oath administered on the fourteenth. It was a fine thing even at Calais. I was extremely delighted and affected, not indeed at the *sensible objects*, though a great multitude is often a grand thing, but the idea of so many millions throughout that great nation, with one consent, at one moment (as it were by Divine inspiration), breaking their bonds asunder, filled one with sympathetic exultation, goodwill, and tenderness. I rejoiced with them from my heart, and most sincerely hope they will not abuse the glorious freedom they have obtained! We were nearly twenty hours on the sea on our return, and

arrived at Dover fatigued and sick to death. Dr. Wynn was obliged to make the best of his way to London on account of a sermon he was engaged to preach, and took his charming sister with him. *We* made haste here, and it is the most agreeable sea-place, excepting those on the Devonshire coast, I ever saw. Perhaps *agreeable* is a bad word, for the country is much more sublime than beautiful. We have tremendous cliffs overhanging and frowning on the foaming sea, which is very often so saucy and tempestuous as to *deserve* frowning on; from whence, when the weather is clear, we see the land of France, and the vessels cross from the Downs to Calais. Sometimes, while you *stand* there, it is amazing with what velocity they skim along. Here are little neat lodgings, and good wholesome provisions. Perhaps they would not suit a great *Countess*, as our friend Mr. Mason has it; but a little great actress is more easily accommodated. I'm afraid it will grow larger though, and then adieu to the comforts of retirement. At present the place cannot contain above twenty or thirty strangers I should think. I have bathed four times, and believe I shall persevere, for Sir Lucas Pepys says my disease is entirely nervous. I believe I am better, but I get on so slowly that I cannot

speak as yet with much certainty. I still defer a good deal. Mr. Siddons leaves me here for a fortnight while he goes to town upon business, and my spirits are so bad that I live in terror of being left alone so long. We have been here nearly three weeks, and I propose staying here if possible till September, when I shall go to town to my brother's for some days, and then set off for Mr. Whalley's, at Bath. I shall hope to see you at Nuncham, though, before you leave it. Now, my dear Lady Harcourt, let me congratulate you upon having almost got to the end of this interesting epistle, and *myself*, in the honour of your friendship, which has flattered me into the comfort of believing that you will not be tired of your prosing but always very affectionate and faithful servant,

“S. SIDDONS.

“Pray offer my love and our united compliments to all.”

This lively and very graphic letter was prompted by that spirit of observation which seemed to be developed in her when on her travels. It is certain that she would have excelled as a diarist or story-teller, and had she chosen to take the trouble, could have furnished a most entertaining volume of travels.

Her account of her journey from Bath, her first expedition to Dublin, together with the present letter, are a good specimen of what she could do in this direction. It will be seen, too, that she had strong prejudices, which, considering what had been the religion of her father and brothers, seems illiberal. But she was always vehement in her dislikes to persons and systems, and her declaration that "fire shall not burn my opinion out of me, so God mend all," is highly characteristic.

"Kirkstall Abbey, near Leeds,

July the 9th, 1807.

"MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—You see where I am, and must know the place by representations as well as reports. I daresay at least my lord does, yea, 'every coigne and vantage' of this venerable pile, and envies me the view of it just before me where I am writing. This is an inn—I set myself down here for the advantage of pure air and perfect quiet, rather than lodge in Leeds, which is the dirtiest, most disagreeable town in his Majesty's dominions, God bless him! This day my task finishes. I have played there four nights, and am *very tired of Kirkstall Abbey*. It is too sombre for a person of my age, and *I* am no anti-



quarian. It is, however, extremely beautiful. I am going to York for a week, and I hope while I am there to hear from you, my ever dear Lady Harcourt. I must work hard a little while longer to realize the blessed prospect (almost, I thank God, within my view) of sitting down in peace and quiet for the remainder of my life: about 250*l*. more a year, will secure to me the comfort of a carriage, and, believe me, it is one of the favourite objects in that prospect that I shall have the happiness of seeing you and my dear Lord Harcourt often, very often; for though time and circumstances, and that proud barrier of high birth, have all combined to separate our persons, yet allow me the honest ambition to think our minds are kindred ones, and, on my part, united ever since I had the honour and good fortune to be known to you. How could it be otherwise; since to know you both is to esteem and love you? Pray let me hear from you very soon. I am very anxious to know that your teasing cough has left you, and that you are both well. When you see your sisters, pray remember me most kindly to them and to General and Mrs. Harcourt. I have some hopes of going to St. Leonard's some time in the autumn, in the meantime I hope Mrs. H. will not forget her

promise of the *sweet Dot*. It gave me great pleasure to see her look so well at Bath. If Mr. and Mrs. Haggitt are at Nuneham, have the goodness to present my kind compliments. And now, my dear Lady Harcourt, I must leave you to dress for Belvidera. It is very sulky weather, and I am not i'the mood for acting, but I must play yet a little while longer, and then!—how peaceful, how comfortable shall I be, after the storms, the tempests, and afflictions of my laborious life! God bless and preserve you, who are to make a large share of my happiness in that hour of peace.—I am, with love to my dear Lord Harcourt and Miss Wilkinson's most respectful compliments, my dear Lady Harcourt, your affectionate and faithful

“S. SIDDONS.”

“ Westbourne Farm,

March, 1808.

“MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—Your kind letter has so completely anticipated all that I have felt, and shall feel long, that I have nothing to inform you of, except my deep sense of your unalterable goodness to me. May I die as poor Mr. Siddons died and prayed to die, without a sigh, without a groan; and may

those to whom I am dear remember *me* when *I* am gone as *I* now remember *him*, forgetting and forgiving all my errors, and recollecting only my quietness of spirit and singleness of heart.

“I shall be forced to go to town on some melancholy arrangements, and will take the first opportunity of waiting upon you. Remember me most kindly to my dear Lord Harcourt; I hope he is as well as (I thank God) you are. May you both live long and happily, and continue to honour with your friendship, my dear Lord and Lady Harcourt, your affectionate and faithful servant,

“S. SIDDONS.”

The next letter, which is undated, refers, of course, to the year 1809, when Covent Garden Theatre was burnt down. It shows the universal kindness and sympathy the family met with under such a trial.

“MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—I was just going to write when your kind letter was put into my hand. As yet I have had neither recollection nor time to think of anything except the tremendous devastation and its afflicting consequences. My poor brother bears it most nobly, with manly firmness, hope, and even *cheerful resignation*. And for me, I now think

only of the mercy which was vouchsafed us in his not having heard of the fire till the whole structure was devoured, so that the lives of both my brothers, which would have been risked in the efforts they would have exerted (perhaps at the expense of limbs and life), are safe, God be praised. I myself was in the house till near twelve o'clock, Mr. Brandon and the watchman saw all safe at near one, and it is as true as it is strange that not a fragment of the whole structure was discoverable at six, at which time my brother first heard of it, and he declared that at that time it was so completely destroyed that you could not have known a building had stood there. The losses of scenes, dresses, &c., are, as you may imagine, incalculable and irreparable. I have lost everything. all my jewels and lace, which I have been collecting for thirty years, and which I could not purchase again, for they were all really fine and curious. I had a point veil, which had been a toilette of the poor Queen of France, near five yards long, and which could not have been bought for anything like so little as a thousand pounds, destroyed, with dresses of my own of great value for costume. In short, *everything I had in the world of stage ornament is gone*, and literally not *one vestige* left of all that has cost me so

much time and money to collect. We are to act at the Opera, and next Monday I shall *attempt* the character of Lady Randolph there. My poor dear brother has to begin the world again. Mrs. Kemble bears it like an angel. Of course I am with them every moment that I can. It is a glorious feeling to see how many noble and friendly attentions have been shown to him on this occasion. Lord Guilford and Lord Mountjoy have offered to advance him any sum of money they can raise by *any* means.

“My head is confused, I scarce know what I write, but you, my dear Lady H., will have the goodness to excuse any abruptness or incoherence under these circumstances. The Prince, too, has been so good and so gracious—*everybody is good and kind*, and, please God, we shall still do well.—Adieu!”

I have not been able to discover what was the “badge of honour” which is referred to in the following letter :—

“Westbourne Farm, Paddington,  
Jany. 19th, 1813.

“MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—I know you are so good as to interest yourself in my happiness, and I hope and believe that you will do me the justice to

think that the expressions of my gratification proceed from better movements than could be excited by either pride or vanity—although I confess the bounty, but above all the graciousness and goodness, of the Queen during the whole of my attendance on her Majesty's commands at Windsor, have certainly given me a feeling of higher elevation and happiness than I am able to describe. This night I wore my badge of honour in a large assembly, where all admired its magnificence, and (I believe) rejoiced that the royal donor had bestowed upon me such a mark of her royal favour. For my own part, I have resolved to wear it as frequently as possible, in order the oftener to recollect her amiable and pious example, and thereby to become a better creature, and more worthy of the high distinction with which I have been honoured; and indeed, my dear Lady Harcourt, to have been able to amuse a little a few of the heavy and mournful hours, the weight of which those royal amiable sufferers must so often feel, has been to me the *greatest*, the *proudest gratification* my talents have ever produced to me. Then, to hear those charming, accomplished Princesses so sweetly and graciously acknowledge the amusement I was so happy as to afford them, oh! it really was a sensation too de-

lightful to be imagined, and I only wish I were near enough to be ready to exert myself for so honourable and excellent a purpose at all times, and at a *moment's notice*, whenever her Majesty might be disposed to lay her gracious commands upon me."

"Bannister's Lodge, Southampton,

Decr. the 12th, 1818.

"MY DEAR LADY HARCOURT,—I cannot repress the anxiety I feel for the state of your health after this long and severe trial, and I flatter myself that the friendship with which you have honoured me for so many years gives me a claim to your indulgence upon a subject which must ever be very deeply interesting to my feelings. I know well how firmly the strength of your mind and high principles would bear you up to fulfil all the sacred duties which the unvarying and affectionate attachment of our most gracious and lamented Queen has called upon you to perform, and which you have so nobly and tenderly fulfilled to the very utmost; and I cannot but be fearful that those mournful and tender offices now no longer occupying your time and thoughts, you may feel the effects of such great and painful exertions even more than you expected; for I know by sad



experience how wonderfully the mind sustains the body while exertions are necessary, and the sad nervous languid state in which they leave one when they cease to be so. From these apprehensions may I not hope, my dear Lady Harcourt, you will relieve me by the favour of a few lines? As it would be the basest ingratitude not to *feel*, so I hope it is not presumptuous to *say*, that my own experience of his gracious goodness to me and mine has made me love, as much as I have always honoured, his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and in his kind and friendly consideration for your feelings and health, my dear Lady Harcourt, he appears *most amiably himself*. It does my heart good to find how the eyes of people have opened to see the sweetness and sensibility of his nature in all his dutiful and tender attentions to his royal parent, and I pray to God that he may receive the fulness of the promise annexed to such pious conduct by 'living long and happily in the land which the Lord God hath given him.' Words cannot express what I felt for him in the performance of the last sad duty, and I most devoutly hope that H. R. H. and the amiable Princesses are all as well as they can be under the pressure of so great an affliction; they have in themselves the best

and most effectual consolations for it—the delightful recollection of having by their unremitting and pious cares alleviated the long sufferings of their august mother, and ensured to themselves the blessing of Heaven.”

The picture of the Prince Regent as a soothing comforter in affliction, and the discovery of the “sweetness and amiability” of his nature, will be new to a generation which has been inclined to deal rather ungraciously with the “First Gentleman in Europe.” It is curious that he should have appeared in the same engaging light to the unlucky “Perdita” Robinson, who was equally captivated by his “sweetness and amiability.” To Mrs. Siddons, however, it must be said, that he exhibited only those attractive qualities which he unquestionably possessed, was always respectful, considerate, and heartily appreciated her great merits. Her friendship with the Harcourts continued for a period of over thirty years, and the letters just set out are an agreeable memorial of the sterling character of that friendship.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## REVIEW OF KEMBLE'S CHARACTERS.

NOTWITHSTANDING the number of characters attempted by Kemble during his career, it becomes a matter of great difficulty to form a clear idea as to the variety of gifts he possessed. The various qualities of his sister all come out clearly before us; and we can see her distinctly in Isabella, Lady Macbeth, or Mrs. Haller. But with Kemble it is different; and we can only call him up before us as the stately and gallant Roman, or as the gloomy and solitary recluse. The truth was, he had not the overwhelming power of touching all hearts that his sister possessed. He had, indeed, the same power of nicely estimating a character, of seeing all the effect that it was capable of; but he gradually allowed the intellectual side of his nature to develop. His *physique* was so stately; his temper, even in private life, so majestic that it was impossible but that his acting must, more or less, be affected. The

best acting must be based on profound study, but the study should be subsidiary to the acting; whereas Kemble too often exhibited the fruits of his study. There is no actor to whom he could be fairly likened, unless it might be Mossop, of course a far inferior player, but whose style seemed an *outré* anticipation of Kemble's.

The first thought, when he made his appearance at Drury Lane, was of course to measure him with Garrick, dead only three or four years. At that time the comparison was, of course, not to be made seriously; but when he had crowned his career by the great performance of Coriolanus, the question of his claim to be considered equal or superior, had to be entertained. Their style was essentially different, though they played in many of the same great pieces, and the effect produced of a different kind.

Kemble had never seen Garrick, and therefore came on the stage undisturbed by any of those recollections which must always constrain a new actor's attempts.\* The greater the powers of the old actor,

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\* Sir Walter Scott, in a charming and almost "gossipy" article in the "Quarterly" (No. 67), discusses the merits of the two great actors fairly and judiciously, and the estimate given in the text is mainly founded on his remarks.

the greater becomes the temptation to copy, and the greater the difficulty to avoid imitation. In their physical gifts there could not have been a greater contrast: Garrick being free, airy, full of quickness and variety in his movements; Kemble tall and majestic, with features that always recalled the finest models of classical times; while his motions were full of a slow harmonious dignity. But their systems of interpretation were still more contrasted; and though it was fashionable to say one was founded on art, and the other on nature, a more accurate judgment would decide that Garrick seized as it were by a sudden instinct the first and most brilliant view of the character he was personating; whereas Kemble, more learned and laborious, would study long and painfully before he could make up his mind. The picture, however, when complete, was so rich and elaborate, so illustrated by corresponding gestures and tones, that it became more valuable and enduring, and commended itself more to a cultivated taste. Hence Garrick was more likely to be popular, though Kemble might give the hearer the effect of an over precision, with a sacrifice of energy to grace.

The mere physical character of Garrick, it will be seen, gave him an advantage for comedy; and indeed

might make us consider him rather a comedian of the first class, with exceptional tragical gifts; and Kemble, a tragedian of the first class, with tempered powers of classical comedy. It might be noticed, too, that as both advanced in life the same alteration took place in their especial gifts: Kemble becoming more stiff and pedantic, and Garrick's comedy less free, and more mannered. The contrast between the two artists in private life was just as marked. Both were fond of the society of people of rank and title, but Kemble never forgot the dignity of his high calling, and would not condescend to recommend himself by such arts as imitative delineations, but always maintained an almost monastic reserve. Garrick, always restless and uncertain of his position, was eager by such little arts as he called "doing his rounds," or telling histrionic anecdotes, to renew his hold upon his society. Kemble's mirth, says Sir Walter, "never exceeded a species of gaiety chastened with gravity. His smile seemed always as if it were the rare inhabitant of that noble countenance. His manners were princely, and on his brow seemed to hang the weight of some intolerable awe." After all, this demeanour conduced not only to his own, but to the gravity of the profession; and even in

this view the influence of Kemble and his sister has contributed much to the true dignity of the profession; just as in the present day the too familiar antics of the players, thrusting themselves before the public unofficially at fancy fairs and other shows, has helped to impair the effect of their performances on the stage. It is singularly remarkable how much Kemble and his sister enjoyed the genuine esteem and friendship of those far above them in rank, without the slightest tinge of *patronage* or condescension. The list of noble families where this gifted pair were welcomed as honoured guests would confound some of our ambitious players.

With this tone and physical habit of mind and body, it becomes evident that comedy of a certain order lay outside Kemble's province. But there was a species of comedy in which he was fitted almost to excel. His own theory was—as he explained to Sir Walter Scott—that with pains and study an actor ought to succeed in both. But this is evidently a false view; something more is surely needed. In Shaksperian comedy, and comedy after Congreve's manner, we might understand his excellence. Thus his Hotspur delighted Sir Walter Scott, who gives a very graphic picture of the way in which Kemble worked



out his own principle—viz., that of study, and the elaborating the meaning of his author. It is the passage where the impetuous Percy is trying to recal the name of a place in England :—

“ In Richard’s time—what do you call the place ?  
A plague upon it !—’tis in Gloucestershire.  
’Twas where the madcap Duke his uncle kept—  
His uncle York.”

“ Through all this confusion of mangled recollections, Kemble chafed and tumbled about his words with the furious impatience of an angry man who has to seek for a pen at the very moment he is about to write a challenge. Then the delight with which he grasped at the word when suggested—‘ at Berkeley Castle.’ ‘ You say true !’ The manner in which Kemble spoke those three words and rushed forward into his abuse of Bolingbroke, like a hunter surmounting the obstacle which stopped his career, was electrical. The effect on the audience was singular. There was a tendency to encore so fine a piece of acting.”

Another competent witness, Charles Lamb, would talk with delight of Kemble’s Charles Surface ; and in a passage full of nice, airy distinctions, makes us see how Kemble must have played the character.

But the justness of this praise would of course depend on the view taken of the interpretation of genteel comedy—whether an accurate and minute elaboration of character was to be applied, according to the views of a certain school.

“I remember,” he says, “it was then the fashion to cry down John Kemble, who took the part of Charles after Smith; but I thought very unjustly. Smith, I fancy, was more airy, and took the eye with a certain gaiety of person. He brought with him no sombre recollections of tragedy. He had not to expiate the fault of having pleased beforehand in lofty declamation. He had no sins of Hamlet or of Richard to atone for. His failure in these parts was a passport to success in one of so opposite a tendency. But, as far as I could judge, the weighty sense of Kemble made up for more personal incapacity than he had to answer for. His harshest tones in this part came steeped and dulcified in good humour. He made his defects a grace. His exact declamatory manner, as he managed it, only served to convey the points of his dialogue with more precision. It seemed to head the shafts and to carry them deeper. Not one of his sparkling sentences was lost. I remember minutely how he delivered each in succession, and

cannot by any effort imagine how any of them could be altered for the better. No man could deliver brilliant dialogue—the dialogue of Congreve or of Wycherley—because none understood it half so well, as John Kemble. His Valentine, in *Love for Love*, was to my recollection faultless. He flagged sometimes in the intervals of tragic passion; he would slumber over the level parts of an heroic character. His Macbeth has been known to nod. But he always seemed to me to be particularly alive to pointed and witty dialogue. The relaxing levities of tragedy have not been touched by any since him—the playful court-bred spirit in which he condescended to the players in *Hamlet*—the sportive relief which he threw into the darker shades of Richard—disappeared with him. He had his sluggish moods, his torpors; but they were the halting-stones and resting-places of his tragedy—politic savings and fetchings of the breath—husbandry of the lungs, where nature pointed him to be an economist—rather, I think, than errors of the judgment. They were at worst less painful than the eternal tormenting unappeasable vigilance, the ‘lidless dragon eyes’ of present fashionable tragedy.”

Yet we must recollect that this was “written in

illustration of that rather fallacious theory of Elia's, and to which he was so very partial; viz., that in characters of "artificial comedy" the player should be *en rapport*, as it were, with the audience; hinting to them every now and then that he was not wholly in earnest. This sort of relation, we can conceive, would suit Kemble's stately manner perfectly. One of his dreams was the presentation of Falstaff under quite a new view of his own; and he was fond of elaborating this theory. This furnishes a little proof that his general principle was not quite sound; for the mere notion of his appearing in such a character—no matter what the "reading"—shows that his taste for study and elaboration was likely to lead him astray.

It might seem strange to those who saw John Kemble take his farewell in 1817, that he should have ever thought of playing the "young" Charles Surface in Sheridan's famous comedy. But from 1791 to 1817 is a long interval; and few can conceive how much his style had altered, and, as it were, hardened. Still, though the idea of the *character* could not have been well presented, we can conceive with Elia that no one could have given the points more effectively. Sheridan affected to say that he was pleased with the

performance ; and Kemble was complimented by being told that it was indeed *Charles's Restoration*. Some one, more witty, added, *sotto voce*, that it was *Charles's Martyrdom*. Kemble overheard this sally ; and it is characteristic of his good humour that he should have volunteered a story of a little street adventure where he had affronted some gentleman, who made it a condition of reconciliation that he should promise solemnly *never to play Charles Surface again*. He gave the promise, and kept it. It was natural, however, that he should be anxious as to the result of this doubtful experiment, and his anxiety betrayed him into an injudicious attempt to make success secure. He had a quarrel with an actress as to some "free admissions ;" and with a spite that is but too often found in the profession, the lady published two letters which had relation, not to the quarrel, but to his performance of Charles Surface.

"Dear Sir," he had written to Topham, a well-known writer of the time, "I have taken the liberty to put Mr. and Mrs. Samuel and Mr. Bonner on the free list, and hope you will have the goodness to give orders to your people to speak favourably of the *Charles*, as more depends on that than you can possibly be aware of."

Mrs. Wells also wrote to urge the same request, but was answered by Topham:—

“DEAR PUD,—I received your letter, where you mention Kemble's wish to be puffed in Charles. You may inform Mr. Este from me that I will not sacrifice the credit of my paper for all the admissions in Europe to puff either the Siddonses or the Kembles in comedy.”

It is always easy to “turn round,” as it is called, in this way, and make a little *exposé*. The relations with the critical department of the newspapers belonged to the business of the theatre, and it was scarcely fair to say that Kemble was wishing to have himself “puffed.” But the actress did not see that she was exposing herself to gratify her own malice, and that she had a share in whatever discredit there was in the transaction.

Another of his attempts at comedy—that of Don Felix, in *The Wonder*—seems about as amusing a notion as his doing Don Giovanni. Well might Colman say that there was too much of the Don and not enough of the Felix. Boaden was delighted with his Lord Townly; and certainly the grave reproving of

the lady all through the piece, and the contrast to her gay disposition, might seem in keeping with Kemble's natural temper. It is still harder to fancy him playing young Marlow; and though Mr. Boaden admired his acting, and said the part was done as *whimsically* as it had ever been done, we must decline to accept "whimsicality" as connected with either Kemble or young Marlow. Walpole thought his *Benedick* superior to Garrick's. But in some characters in which he was admired, it was admitted his excellence was not remarkable. In *Richard III.*, which he played with great vigour, he could not look villanous enough. He seemed more an angry country gentleman; and say what evil he would of himself, remarks Sir Walter, the audience would not believe him. In this character, as well as in Sir Giles Overreach, he was confessedly inferior to Kean. Indeed, if the question were to be decided as to what was to be his place with regard to the great player who succeeded him, as well as with regard to the one who preceded him, he must, on a general review, be placed below both. They possessed more genius, more passion, more universality than he did; and those gifts are far more *likely* to increase the public stock of harmless pleasure. In *Lear*, Scott thinks he must have been



inferior to Garrick, and in Hamlet about his equal; in both of which judgments we might concur. In Macbeth he was unapproachable; though in this part the playing of his sister came in aid of his own.

“We never can forget,” says Scott, “the rueful horror of his look, which by strong exertion, he endeavoured to conceal, when on the morning succeeding the murder he receives Lennox and Macduff. His efforts to appear composed, his endeavours to assume the attitude and appearance of one listening to Lennox’s account of the external terrors of the night while in fact he is expecting the alarm to arise within the Royal apartment, formed a most astonishing piece of playing. Kemble’s countenance seemed altered by the sense of internal horror, and had a cast of that of Count Ugolino, as painted by Reynolds. When Macbeth felt himself obliged to turn towards Lennox and reply to what he had been saying, you saw him like a man awaking from a fit of absence, endeavour to recollect at least the general tenor of what had been said, and it was some time before he could bring out the general reply, ‘’Twas a rough night.’ Those who have had the good fortune to see Kemble and Mrs. Siddons in Macbeth and his lady, may be

satisfied they have witnessed the highest perfection of the dramatic art."

I have spoken of the great histrionic art of conveying the character by a sort of "air" and bearing—the diffusing over the stage without speech or action, the sense of coming horrors, of despair, terror, &c. In this play Kemble seemed always overborne and depressed by the weight of the predictions of the witches; to carry about with him a gloomy sense that these were to be fulfilled. His conception of Macbeth, like his sister's, was only arrived at after the profoundest and most laborious study; the same amount of which had no doubt been applied to Hamlet. But in that instance, all was absorbed into the mere intellectual portion: while in Macbeth it developed into action. In an excellent essay on Le Kain's acting, Talma has unfolded what he thought were the principles that should guide a great actor—namely, study and intelligence. He there disposes most happily of the common idea that fire, spirit, and power are sufficient. There must be besides the proper tone given to the part, which produces the grandest effect, but which for actors who have not studied is almost impalpable. Kemble's friend who contributed the very discriminating notice of his life and

gifts, before alluded to, to the Annual Biography, lays down what applies to Macready and actors of the same school: "Sometimes a single intonation of his revived a whole history." And though his apparently laboured manner impressed many critics with the notion that they had never seen anything in real life like it; still in a second or third hearing unnoticed beauties began to develope, the actor's meaning became more and more apparent, the results of profoundest study were disclosed. And this was one of the charms of the old acting; of "seeing Garrick," or Kemble, or Siddons. It was like reperusing Shakspeare—repetition never palled, and only disclosed new beauties. He appeared to depart from nature—and here we only speak of him in his finest characters—because he followed the rule of a sort of selection, and chose the finest and more exceptional phases, and modes of interpreting—just as poets like Shakspeare chose the finer modes for their expression. "His wildest passion was at a distance from extravagance, and was the finest exemplification of the truth that distortions and writhings are ineffectue in proportion as they are outrageous. In him everything had a distinct meaning: every look and tone, not only had a purpose in themselves, *but converged to the general*

*effect."* The same critic also dwelt on the air of intellectual superiority, the peculiarity of manner and appearance, which impressed the spectator at a glance, and showed that he was not of the race of common men. His voice was defective in the middle tones, owing to some asthmatic affection, but strong in declamation. Indeed most great actors have had some physical gifts which peculiarly fitted them for their profession, like Garrick's eye.

A great actor will not merely work out a special view of particular characters. He will have a general principle applicable to them—a treatment peculiar to himself. And this opens a very interesting speculation, namely, what is the suitable medium through which he is to convey his idea of character to the spectator. This will be understood better by considering the different styles, and even modes of handling in painting. Some use minute touches conveying every thought by a finished painted symbol—a leaf, by a painted copy of a leaf: some bring out merely the general impression of the whole scene in the mind, and make all subsidiary to the grand tone of the whole. If we look into many paintings we shall see that the details are merely indicated by rude, almost uncouth touches, whereas

others exhibit every object carefully shaped and finished. So is it with acting. What may be called histrionic tone or colour has been almost entirely neglected on the English stage. It is the truest dramatic instinct, and is one of the glories of the French school. There the mere language of the character is the poorest; but the actor's bearing, his air and his every tone and gesture, are dictated by the nature of the character he is supporting. This is the charm of Mr. Fechter's acting in parts like "Ruy Blas:" this was the great attraction of Charles Kemble in characters like Cassio and Faulconbridge, and there can be no doubt that this is one of the necessary elements of what is truly dramatic. John Kemble being a Shaksperian student, and inclined to over-elaborate passages, lacked this changing colour, though in characters of a gloomy sort, or in those of the "Noble Roman" order, like Coriolanus, he could impart it. But on the whole this seems to have been the extent of his range. As Hazlitt said of him with almost too much severity, "He is in fact as shy of committing himself with nature as a maid is of committing herself with her lover. All the proper forms and ceremonies must be complied with before they two can be made one flesh. Mr. Kemble

sacrifices too much to decorum. *He is chiefly afraid of being contaminated by too close an identity with the character he represents . . . .* He endeavours to raise nature to the dignity of his own person and demeanour, and declines with a graceful smile, and a wave of the hand, the ordinary services she might do him." This is of course exaggerated; but we may suspect there was much truth in the description. Mr. Kemble always seemed to convey a sort of lofty hint that the great "John Kemble" was there present, and interpreting the character.

Nothing could illustrate this better than some very judicious remarks which are in substance his own, and which, though directed to a particular subject, show us how deep his principle lay. I make no scruple of dwelling at some length on this point, and this too for the benefit of those who follow Kemble's profession. To judge by the average acting of the day, this description of study is utterly unknown to players. By "study," even the most industrious actor means quite a different thing. He will study to look for vigorous and effective points: or he will try different fashions of giving the same passage. But the exploring the hidden tone of a character, and reconciling with that all passages indiscriminately: study-

ing human nature generally, and his own nature, to find out the conditions by which a particular passage should be left *neutral*, as it were, this is an art which is almost unknown. These remarks, given in Boaden's "Life," apply particularly to Macbeth, but they are capable of a general application.

"The actor who looks no farther than common nature for the expression of the passions, will be short of the true mark ; for though we are as men all liable to the same influences, they are greatly modified by our personal qualities and individual habits. For instance, in the character of Macbeth an actor of no great elevation of mind, but of strong imagination, may throw out in his whole manner so speaking a terror, that he shall certainly be the true and perfect image of one who had committed a murder ; but he may still leave a question to the spectator whether that murderer be *Macbeth* or not ? Does the actor, for instance, exhibit to us a noble nature absolutely sunk and depraved by that act, or a base one losing its very cunning in the fear of detection ? Is he a hero who descends to become an assassin, or a common stabber who rises to become a royal murderer ? The direction in these cases is uniform. Look at the poet,; you will see with what properties he invests his



character ; embody them, and you will be its just and natural representative. To be sure, there can be no doubt of it, the difficulty is to hold steadily the conception thus formed, and to express all the characteristics of which it is composed. It is unnecessary to go minutely into the character of Macbeth ; it has been analysed with great skill by Mr. Kemble himself, by Mr. Whately, Professor Richardson, and others. The moral progression of the part must be the constant inspirer of the actor ; above all, he must keep before him the influence of those *spirits who know all mortal consequences* ; without this mental discipline to regulate the whole, the mere external demonstrations will often appear forced, disjointed, and unnatural ; a regard to this principle removes all seeming inconsistency, and combines the whole into one great and consistent character. The difficulties of such a task may well astonish our minds, and it may be reasonably enough asked whether all this is done by an actor on the stage ? The answer is ready ; such must be the process ; in all efforts approaching to perfection, this is done. There is a mode of passing through a character with no more effort than will satisfy a common knowledge of it. If the actor seems to be in earnest, is sufficiently noisy, declaims in the

received tone, or has some strange one of his own, if he practise all the tricks of his profession, if his body be disposed in suitable attitudes, his features wrung into what he calls expression, and he look successfully, there will be usually little doubt of its being a very fine performance ; so no doubt it is, of what everybody alike has done upon the common stages of England for a hundred years together. Is this *Nature* well understood? is this *Art* in its perfection? Neither. It is a drilled exercise which a *boy* has been made to do who never comprehended the reason for any one thing that he did. It may now be seen that where characters are finely made out by the poet, where qualities of the same mind oppose each other, where the passions themselves have a thousand shades admitting of palpable discrimination, it is no light study that *he* takes up, who would indeed become an actor. The short or royal road here is, "Ask your heart how you would feel in a similar situation." Again we say, right; nothing can be better. But what *is* that situation? How is it to be known but by accurate study? How is it to be expressed but by the most entire assimilation to the part? The qualities must be seemingly alike, or pass for similar: all the delicacies of character must be conceived, or

they cannot be expressed ; without much refinement in the actor they will not even be suspected. He should therefore be a man mentally and personally highly accomplished. What I have above endeavoured to point out may be termed the academic or critical style of acting : it is built on a metaphysical search into our nature, and a close attention to all the minutiae of language. It deals, therefore, in *pauses* which were not before made, for the unlearned actor cared little about the transitions of thought. He never examined of the associations of our ideas how much in dramatic dialogue is suppressed, and never dreamt that the rapid junction of ideas totally unconnected is violent and unmeaning. It lays a peculiar *stress* upon words which before received no emphasis, because it analyses everything by which meaning is conveyed, and can leave nothing to chance which ought to be settled by reason. In short, what philosophical criticism had discovered to be properties of Shakspeare's characters the actor now endeavoured to show to be a just representative of the part ; he was to become a living commentary on the poet. It will be said, it has been said, all this is but the vanity of the art ; a mixed and popular assembly desires none of it, they are better satisfied

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with a representation less refined. The answer to this is obvious. I say, then, if any part of such mixed assembly require this excellence, it should be had, at first for *their* enjoyment, at length for that of *lower masses*, who though originally *purblind to the business*, will soon from imitation, and at last from judgment, prefer this refinement in their amusements to the gross and vulgar style formerly endured. But if such attention be paid to the exhibition of character, there is also to be noticed an inferior branch of the actor's art, addressed exclusively to the ear. The verse that has been modulated with the happiest skill, claims to be uttered in a cadence of corresponding melody. The language of poetry is by no means common speech, nor is it to be lowered by a rugged and colloquial familiarity. The great poet knows his meaning perfectly, and always shows it to his intelligent reader. He gives occasionally passages of high declamatory music which must be sustained by the actor's organ. He at intervals throws in brief touches of feeling in the language of daily life, and the simpler the expressions are the more brilliant are the effects they produce. Write the whole play in such a diction, and it would be a creeping, prosaic, vulgar performance. One of these familiar touches

(the reader will supply hundreds) occurs to me in Macbeth. After the spirit of Banquo has vanished, the trembling usurper falters out to his reproaching queen—"If I stand here I saw him." The reader who remembers the tone and gesture which from Mr. Kemble conveyed this assertion to the audience, will know how truly he could hit the merely natural, when no other considerations called upon him for a more elevated style of utterance. The learned and perfect actor will at all times be the genuine representative of the poet in the character. He will never debase his conceptions nor deprave his language. The flights of fancy will seem to spring from *his* imagination, the verse will flow from organs accustomed to be delighted with its music."

"Kemble appears to me," wrote one whom Scott loved, Washington Irving, "to be a very studied actor; his performances throughout evince deep study and application, joined to amazingly judicious conception. They are correct and highly-finished paintings, but much laboured; thus, therefore, when witnessing the exertion of his powers, though my head is satisfied, and even astonished, yet my heart is seldom affected. I am not led away to forget that it is Kemble the actor, not Othello the Moor. Once I must own,

however, I was completely overpowered by his acting ; it was in the part of Zanga—he was great throughout. But his last scene with Alonzo was truly sublime. I then in very truth forgot that it was a mere mimic scene before me ; indeed, Kemble seemed to have forgotten himself, and for the moment to have fancied himself Zanga. When the delusion ceased I was enraptured ; I was surprised at what had been my emotions. I could not have believed that tragic representation could so far deceive the senses and the judgment. I felt willing to allow Kemble all the laurels that had been awarded him. The next time I saw him, however, I was less satisfied ; it was in the character of Othello. Here his performance was very unequal ; in many parts he was cold and laboured, in the tender scenes he wanted mellowness (I think him wanting very often in this quality), it was only in particular scenes that he seemed to collect all his powers, and exert them with effect. His speech to the Senate was lofty and admirable—indeed, in declamation he is excellent. The last time I saw him was in the part of Jaffier, and I again remarked that it was but in certain passages that he was strikingly fine, though his correct and unceasing attention to the character was visible throughout.

Kemble treads the stage with peculiar grace and dignity; his figure is tall and imposing, much such an one as Fennell's. His countenance is noble and expressive; in a word, he has a most majestic presence. I must not forget to observe that the Pierre to Kemble's Jaffier was acted by Mr. Hargrave, and a *noisy, swaggering bully* did he make of him. I would have given anything to have had Cooper or Fennell in the character; so you see a principal character may be miserably performed even on a London stage. Kemble's grand disadvantage is his voice; it wants the deep, rich bass tones, and has not sufficient effect. Constant exercise has doubtless done a vast deal for it, and given it a degree of flexibility and softness which it had not naturally. Some of its tones are touching and pathetic, but when violent exclamation is necessary, it is evident, from the movements of his head, and mouth, and chest, that he is obliged to use great exertions. This circumstance was at first a considerable drawback on the pleasure I received from his performances. I begin now to get reconciled to it, and not to notice it so much, which confirms me in the opinion I originally entertained, that it is necessary to become in some degree accustomed to Kemble's manner before you can perfectly enjoy his acting."



This was written in the flush of youth, during his first visit to Europe. Here is a retrospect made a short time before his death. "The finest group I ever saw was at Covent Garden, when Cooke, after a long disgrace for his intemperance, reappeared on the boards to play Iago to John Kemble's Othello. Mrs. Siddons played Desdemona, and Charles Kemble, Cassio, beautifully. Kemble (John) had sent for Cooke to rehearse with him at his room, but Cooke would not go. 'Let *Black Jack*,' so he called Kemble, 'come to me.' So they went on the boards without previous rehearsal. In the scene in which Iago instils his suspicions, Cooke grasped Kemble's left hand with his own, and then fixed his right, like a claw, on his shoulder. In this position, drawing himself up to him with his short arm, he breathed his poisonous whispers. Kemble coiled and twisted his hand, writhing to get away, his right hand clasp- ing his brow, and darting his eye back on Iago. It was wonderful." "Didn't I play up to Black Jack," cried Cooke to Irving, in New York. "I saw his dark eye sweeping back upon me."

But there were certain blemishes in Kemble, which, perhaps, came from this minute over-elaboration, and thus imparted disagreeable associations to his playing.

Thus he often delayed, or kept suspended, the action so long, that the spectators anticipated the effect that was coming, like "the warning" in clocks before going to strike. This was noticed by Mrs. Siddons herself to Scott, as well as the loss of grace through his choice of constrained attitudes, and she illustrated it very happily. She placed herself in the attitude of one of the Egyptian statues, the elbows close to the sides, the knees joined; and thus having made Scott observe that it was the most ungraceful position conceivable, proceeded to recite Lear's curse in a fashion that made his very hair rise and his flesh creep—made him remark how much the concentrated energy of the part was improved by the attitude.

Both Hazlitt and Scott agreed in one characteristic criticism of his special excellence and special fault. Both considered that the range of parts in which he excelled were those which consisted "in the development of some one solitary sentiment or exclusive passion. From a want of rapidity," says Hazlitt, "of scope, and variety, he was often deficient in expressing the variety and complication of different interests; nor did he possess the faculty of overpowering the mind by sudden and irresistible bursts of passion; but in giving the habitual workings of a

predominant feeling, as in Penruddock, *The Stranger*, in *Coriolanus*, *Cato*, and some others, where all the passions move round a central point, and are governed by one master-key, he stood unrivalled. Penruddock, in the *Wheel of Fortune*, was one of his most correct and interesting performances, and one of the most perfect on the modern stage. The deeply-rooted, mild, pensive melancholy of the character, its embittered recollections and dignified benevolence, were conveyed by Mr. Kemble with equal truth, elegance, and feeling. In *The Stranger*, again, which is, in fact, the same character, he brooded over the recollection of disappointed hope till it became a part of himself: it sunk deeper into his mind the longer he dwelt upon it; his regrets only became more profound as they became more durable. His person was moulded to the character. The weight of sentiment which oppressed him was never suspended: the spring at his heart was never lightened—it seemed as if his whole life had been a suppressed sigh! So in *Coriolanus*, he exhibited the ruling passion with the same unshaken firmness, he preserved the same haughty dignity of demeanour, the same energy of will and unbending sternness of temper throughout. He was swayed by a single impulse. His tenacious-

ness of purpose was only irritated by opposition; he turned neither to the right nor the left; the vehemence with which he moved forward increasing every instant, till it hurried him on to the catastrophe. In Leontes, also, in *The Winter's Tale* (a character he at one time played often), the growing jealousy of the King, and the exclusive possession which this passion gradually obtains over his mind, were marked by him in the finest manner, particularly where he exclaims:—

“Is whispering nothing?  
Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?  
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career  
Of laughter with a sigh (a note infallible  
Of breaking honesty)? Horsing foot on foot?  
Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift?  
Hours minutes? The noon midnight? and all eyes  
Blind with the pin and web but theirs; theirs only,  
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?  
Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing?  
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia's nothing,  
My wife is nothing, if this be nothing!”

“In the course of this enumeration, every proof told stronger, and followed with quicker and harder strokes; his convictions became more riveted at every step of his progress, and at the end his mind and “every corporal agent” appeared wound up to a frenzy of despair. In such characters, Mr. Kemble

had no occasion to call to his aid either the resources of invention or the tricks of the art: his success depended on the increasing intensity with which he dwelt on a given feeling, or enforced a passion that resisted all interference or control.

“In Hamlet, on the contrary, Mr. Kemble, in our judgment, unavoidably failed from a want of flexibility, of that quick sensibility which yields to every motive, and is borne away with every breath of fancy; which is distracted in the multiplicity of its reflections, and lost in the uncertainty of its resolutions. There is a perpetual undulation of feeling in the character of Hamlet; but in Mr. Kemble’s acting “there was neither variableness nor shadow of turning.” He played it like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose, in one undeviating straight line, which is as remote from the natural grace and indolent susceptibility of the character, as the sharp angles and abrupt starts to produce an effect which Mr. Kean throws into it.

“In King John, which was one of Mr. Kemble’s most admired parts, the transitions of feeling, though just and powerful, were prepared too long beforehand and were too long in executing to produce their full effect. The actor seemed waiting for some compli-

cated machinery to enable him to make his next movement, instead of trusting to the true impulses of passion. There was no sudden collision of opposite elements; the golden flash of genius was not there; "the fire i' th' flint was cold," for it was not struck. If an image could be constructed by magic art to play King John, it would play it in much the same manner that Mr. Kemble played it.

"In Macbeth, Mr. Kemble was unequal to "the tug and war" of the passions which assail him; he stood as it were at bay with fortune, and maintained his ground too steadily against "fate and metaphysical aid," instead of staggering and reeling under the appalling visions of the preternatural world, and having his frame wrenched from all the holds and resting places of his will, by the stronger power of imagination. In the latter scenes, however, he displayed great energy and spirit, and there was a fine melancholy retrospective tone in his manner of delivering the lines—

"My way of life has fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf,"—

which smote upon the heart, and remained there ever after. His Richard III. wanted that tempest and whirlwind of the soul, that life and spirit and

dazzling rapidity of motion, which fills the stage and burns in every part of it when Mr. Kean performs this character. To Mr. Kean's acting in general, we might apply the lines of the poet, where he describes—

“The fiery soul that, working out its way,  
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,  
And o'er-inform'd the tenement of clay.”

“Mr. Kemble's manner, on the contrary, had always something dry, hard, and pedantic in it. “You shall relish him more in the scholar than the soldier:” but his monotony did not fatigue, his formality did not displease; because there was always sense and meaning in what he did. The fineness of Mr. Kemble's figure may be supposed to have led to that statue-like appearance which his acting was sometimes too apt to assume: as the diminutiveness of Mr. Kean's person has probably compelled him to bustle about too much, and to attempt to make up for the want of dignity of form by the violence and contrast of his attitudes. If Mr. Kemble were to remain in the same posture for half an hour, his figure would only excite admiration: if Mr. Kean were to stand still only for a moment, the contrary effect would be apparent. One of the happiest and



most spirited of all Mr. Kemble's performances, and in which even his defects were blended with his excellences to produce a perfect whole, was his *Pierre*. The dissolute indifference assumed by this character to cover the darkness of his designs and the fierceness of his revenge, accorded admirably with Mr. Kemble's natural manner; and the tone of morbid, rancorous raillery in which *Pierre* delights to indulge, was in unison with the actor's reluctant, contemptuous personifications of gaiety, with the scornful spirit of his Comic Muse, which always laboured *invita Minerva*, against the grain. *Cato* was another of those parts for which Mr. Kemble was peculiarly fitted by his physical advantages. There was nothing for him to do in this character but to appear in it. It had all the dignity of still-life. It was a studied piece of classical costume—a conscious exhibition of elegantly disposed drapery, that was all: yet, as a mere display of personal and artificial grace, it was inimitable.

“It has been suggested that Mr. Kemble chiefly excelled in his Roman characters, and, among others, in *Brutus*. If it be meant that he excelled in those which imply a certain stoicism of feeling and energy of will, this we have already granted; but *Brutus* is

not a character of this kind, and Mr. Kemble failed in it for that reason. Brutus is not a stoic, but a humane enthusiast. There is a tenderness of nature under the garb of assumed severity; an inward current of generous feelings, which burst out in spite of circumstances with bleeding freshness; a secret struggle of mind, and disagreement between his situation and his intentions; a lofty inflexibility of purpose mingled with an effeminate abstractedness of thought, which Mr. Kemble did not give.

“In short, we think the distinguishing excellence of his acting may be summed up in one word—*intensity*; in the seizing upon some one feeling or idea, in insisting upon it, in never letting it go, and in working it up with a certain graceful consistency and conscious grandeur of conception, to a very high degree of pathos or sublimity. If he had not the unexpected bursts of nature and genius, he had all the regularity of art; if he did not display the tumult and conflict of opposite passions in the soul, he gave the deepest and most permanent interest to the uninterrupted progress of individual feeling; and in embodying a high idea of certain characters, which belong rather to sentiment than passion, to energy of will than to

loftiness or to originality of imagination, he was the most excellent actor of his time."

Scott, who was his friend and admirer, in several letters takes precisely the same view; and this unusual agreement in men of such cultivation, who could not have seen each other's criticism, may be accepted as earnest of a fair and satisfactory judgment. "John Kemble is a great artist," he wrote to Miss Baillie; "but he shows too much of his machinery. I wish he could be double capped, as they say of watches. *He is great in those parts where character is tinged* by some acquired and systematic habit, like stoicism or misanthropy; but sudden turns and natural bursts of passion are not his forte. I saw him in Sir Giles Overreach the other night, and he is not within two miles of Cooke."

Leigh Hunt's pleasant criticisms on the actors of his youth have a genuineness and earnestness which often make up for the want of nice critical distinctions. He too observed this feature of Kemble's acting, and his excellence in characters of a certain cast and coloured by a single purpose or emotion; but from inexperience, he did not reach the same solution as the more experienced Scott and Hazlitt. "It is in characters," he says, "that are occupied

with themselves and their own importance, that Mr. Kemble is the actor." But such would not be the accurate description of characters like Cato, or Hamlet, or Macbeth: and he might readily compare the importance with which others would invest a single central figure with an eagerness to engross attention. This was the effect of Kemble's strength, but not the cause. But considering the fact that three capable critics with full opportunities of judging were thus fairly agreed, their opinion may be accepted as a tolerably just one.

Mrs. Inchbald allowed her admiration for an old friend, and possibly for an old admirer, to induce her to claim for him the praise of being one of the first lovers on the stage. She says, that he can paint love more vigorously than any other man, though he cannot love *moderately*: in her opinion, "sighs soft complainings, a plaintive voice, and tender looks bespeak mere moderation; Mr. Kemble," she continues, "must be struck to the heart's core, or not at all: he must be wounded to the soul with grief, despair, or madness." But, as Hunt says, justly, "this is mistaking the associated passion for its companion. . . . No man, according to this idea, can express a perfect love, that is, a love opposed to mere moderation,

unless he be struck with grief, or desperate, or mad." Indeed the laboured amorousness of the great actor, in parts of a softened character, often caused great amusement. But the subject of Kemble's peculiarities and mannerisms, which also contributed largely to the diversion of the town, is a large one, which reverence for so great a player might tempt us to pass by, were it not that they were a leading feature of his system, and what he foolishly believed to be a portion of his strength. And it must certainly be considered a proof of inferiority, in his very conception of what should be the object of study, that all his defects were literally excellences exaggerated into blemishes. Thus his painstaking study and illustration of his author's meaning, became in time so overdone as to cramp all that was natural, and give an artificial air. His attention to "by-play" produced the same effect, while his fantastic pronunciation of words like "aches" and "beard," adhered to with a pertinacity that challenged hostility, was petty and almost ridiculous. That comic associations should attend the stately march of a great tragedian was surely a drawback to his producing strong dramatic effects; and Leigh Hunt, in some pleasant passages shows how hearty was the enjoy-

ment of the pit at these freaks." Of another necessary stage artifice, which is called *bye-play*, and which beguiles the intervals of action by an air of perpetual occupation, he is a perfect master; he never stands feebly inactive, waiting for his turn to speak; he is never out of his place, he attends to everything passing on the stage at once, nor does he indulge himself in those complacent stares at the audience which occupy inferior actors.

"This attention to the minute however is often employed needlessly; he has made it a study hardly less important than that of the passions, and hence arises the great fault of his acting, a laborious and almost universal preciseness. Some of the instances of this fault are so ludicrous that a person who had not seen him would scarcely credit the relation: he sometimes turns from one object to another with so cautious a circumflexion of head, that he is no doubt very often pitied by the audience for having a stiff neck; his words now and then follow one another so slowly and his face all the while assumes so methodical an expression, that he seems reckoning how many lines he has learnt by heart. I have known him make an eternal groan upon the interjection *Oh!* as if he were determined to show that his misery

had not affected his lungs; and to represent an energetical address he has kept so continual a jerking and nodding of the head, that at last if he represented anything at all, it could be nothing but Saint Vitus's dance: by this study of nonentities it would appear that he never pulls out his handkerchief without a design upon the audience, that he has as much thought in making a step as making a speech, in short that his very finger is eloquent and that nothing means something. But all this neither delights nor deceives the audience: of an assembly collected together to enjoy a rational entertainment, the majority will always be displeased with what is irrational though they may be unable to describe their sensations critically: irrationalities amuse in farce only. An audience when judging the common imitations of life have merely to say "Is it like ourselves?"

"Perhaps there is not a greater instance of the ill effects one bad habit, like this, can produce, than in Mr. Kemble's delivery. No actor in his declamation pleases more at some times or more offends at others. His voice is hollow and monotonous from the malformation, as it is said, of his organs of utterance: its weakness cannot command a variety of sound



sufficiently powerful for all occasions, nor is its natural extent melodious or pleasing; but a voice naturally monotonous must be distinguished from a monotony of delivery; the latter neglects emphasis and expression, the former though it will not always obtain, may always attempt both. No player perhaps understands his author better, and such a knowledge will easily impart itself to others: his declamation therefore is confident and exact, he is at all times carefully distinct, and his general delivery is marked, expressive, and even powerful: the art with which he supplies the natural weakness of his voice by an energy and significancy of utterance is truly admirable. But the same affectation which indulges itself in an indiscriminate importance of manner, the same ambition of originality where originality is least wanted, characterizes Mr. Kemble's pronunciation: it has induced him to defy all orthoepy and to allow no accent but what pleases his caprice or his love of innovation. To be novel for the mere sake of novelty belongs neither to genius nor to judgment. Mr. Kemble insists that the word *rode* should be *rod*, *beard* is metamorphosed into *bird*, he never *pierces* the heart but *purses* it, and *virtue* and *merchant* become in the dialect of the kitchen *varchue* and

*marchant*; the strong syllable *er* appears to be an abomination, and is never allowed utterance; Pope says

“To err is human, to forgive divine”—

but Mr. Kemble will not consent to this; he says

“To air is human——”

making the moralist say, that it is the nature of man to dry his clean shirt or to take a walk: *thy* is changed into *thě* probably because the sound of *my* is sometimes contracted into *mě*; but mutabilities of pronunciation in one word never argue for them in another; people are not accustomed to say, such a man has a *wřě* neck, or that it is very *drě* weather. Dr. Johnson, who had an antipathy to the short pronunciation *wĩnd* and wished to call it *wind*, attacked the custom by a ludicrous assemblage and mispronunciation of other words, in which the letter *i* is naturally long, and said with much critical gravity,—“*I have a mĩnd to fĩnd why you call that wĩnd.*” But this pleasantry did not change the pronunciation in general converse. Let us see how Mr. Kemble would improve the following lines; we will put his improvement after the original, since the beauty of the contrast will be greater.

“Virtue, thy happy wisdom’s known  
In making what we wish our own ;  
Nay, e’en to wish what wishes thee  
Imparts the blest reality :  
For since the soul that pierces mine,  
Sweet Myra’s soul, is full of thine,  
In my breast too thy spirit stirs,  
Since all my soul is full of hers.”

Mr. Kemble’s improvement.

“*Varchue*, the happy wisdom’s known  
In making what we wish our own ;  
Nay, e’en to wish what wishes thee  
Imparts the blest reality :  
For since the soul that *purses* mine,  
Sweet Myra’s soul, is full of thine,  
In my breast too thy spirit *stares*,  
Since all my soul is full of *hairs* !”

This is very amusing, but there is no rule for pronunciation but custom ; as customs change, actors may change ; but no individual should alter what he has no reason for altering, or what has either a bad effect or none at all when altered.”

Let us conceive two gentlemen in conversation making use of the language of Mr. Kemble, and the astonishment of a third person overhearing them. We will suppose that an officer of the regiment who has just been ordered to let the beard grow on the upper lip, is accosted by a fashionable friend :—

A. Ha, Captain, how dost? The<sup>1</sup> appearance would be much improved by a little more attention to the<sup>2</sup> bird.<sup>3</sup>

B. Why, so I think: there's no sentimint<sup>4</sup> in a bird.<sup>5</sup> But then it serves to distinguish the soldier, and there is no doubt much military vartue<sup>6</sup> in looking furful.<sup>7</sup>

A. But the girls, Jack, the girls! Why the<sup>8</sup> mouth is enough to banish kissing from the airth<sup>9</sup> etairnally.<sup>10</sup>

B. In mairey,<sup>11</sup> no more of that! Zounds, but the shopkeepers and the marchants<sup>12</sup> will get the better of us with the dear souls! However, as it is now against military law to liave a tender countenance, and as some birds,<sup>13</sup> I thankheaven, are of a tolerable quaaality,<sup>14</sup> I must make a vartue<sup>15</sup> of necessity, and as I can't look soft for the love of my girl, I must e'en look hijjus<sup>16</sup> for the love of my country.

Is it not a pity that an actor who can give such dignity to what is worthy of being dignified, should, by an indiscriminate importance, level it with meaner matter? The following lines were delivered with

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<sup>1</sup> Thy.

<sup>2</sup> Thy.

<sup>3</sup> Beard.

<sup>4</sup> Sentiment.

<sup>5</sup> Beard.

<sup>6</sup> Virtue.

<sup>7</sup> Fearful.

<sup>8</sup> Thy.

<sup>9</sup> Earth.

<sup>10</sup> Eternally.

<sup>11</sup> Mercy.

<sup>12</sup> Merchants.

<sup>13</sup> Beards.

<sup>14</sup> Quality.

<sup>15</sup> Virtue.

<sup>16</sup> Hideous.

almost as heroic a resolution as the last. Coriolanus means to be familiar; but Mr. Kemble is—what shall we say?—is still Mr. Kemble:—

“*Cor.* I will go wash :  
And when my face is fair, you shall perceive  
Whether I blush or no.”

The word *fair* might positively have been measured by a stop-watch: instead of being a short monosyllable, it became a word of tremendous elongation. We can describe the pronunciation by nothing else than by such a sound as *fay-er-r-r*. Luckily for our fastidious, or as Mr. Kemble would say, our *fastijjus* ears, we had no opportunity of hearing *bird* for *beard*; but it was in vain to expect any repose in orthoepy, when Mr. Kemble had gotten such a word as *Aufidius* to transmogrify. This he universally called *Aufijjus*, like a young lady who talks of her *ojus* lover, or the *ojus* month of November. The name too of Coriolanus is divided by Mr. Kemble with syllabical precision into five distinct sounds, though the general pronunciation, as well as Shakspeare himself, shortens the *rio* into one syllable, as in the word *chariot*; the alteration is of no effect but to give a stiffness to what is already too stiff, and to render many of the poet's lines harsh and unmetrical. It is unlucky for Mr.

Kemble's audience that he never meets with a line in which this absurdity would be too frequently glaring to be endured."

This was no more than pedantry ; and it was justly urged that through the play of Coriolanus he was not at all so careful ; in other passages putting the metre sadly out of joint. This was indeed the *reductio ad absurdum* of histrionic study ; and the object of innumerable jests which were made upon this weakness :—

QUERY.

"Pray is Kemble really ill ?

One day demanded Ned of Will.

Why, yes, says Will, 'tis truly said ;

I heard his dismal groans

When he had aitches in his head ;

They've now got in his bones."

Another "skit" took the shape of a soliloquy by Cooke :—

"Aitches or akes—shall I speak both or neither ?

If akes, I violate my Shakesperean measure,

If aitches, I shall give King Johnny pleasure.

I've hit upon it. 'Jove, I'll utter neither."

Yet after all, what Kemble stated under his hand, that he only pronounced the two syllables where the metre required it, had some weight ; and that if he in-

sisted on making two syllables of the word "aches," he should have pronounced them "a-kes." His friend Scott, a true specimen of profound black-letter wisdom, without a tinge of pedantry, dealt with this weakness good-humouredly, and described pleasantly the encounters with the pit to which the "great John" exposed himself on this score. "Night after night," he says, "he menaced Caliban with aitches, and was assailed by it with something like ferocity." He recalled one evening, when Kemble found himself too ill to fight the point, and quietly omitted the whole line. The expectant faces of the pittites as he approached the passage, their bewilderment as the challenged line was not heard, and their blank faces as they at last discovered that their expected prey had been snatched from them, was a humorous spectacle for one who was a master of humour, and who, with all his friendship and admiration for the actor, found something in this combination of real tragic force and solemnity in trifles that was very piquant and reached to burlesque.

Scott also recalls the amazement of a critical audience when Kemble introduced a disagreeable reading in *Macbeth*—"magot-pies" for "magpies;" and the deliberate, almost hostile, fashion in which the



actor forced it on his hearers. Hunt even playfully suggested that “a little lexicon” should be supplied on the back of each playbill, to help the audience to understand Mr. Kemble’s peculiar “orthœpy, so that,” as he said, “every lady or gentleman, who should purchase a playbill, might find a list of the performers on one side of it, and the means of understanding them on the other :—

aches . . . .	aitches.
beard . . . .	bird.
cheerful . . . .	churful.
conscience . . . .	conshince.
earth . . . .	airth.
err . . . . .	air (and so in every recurrence of the syllables <i>er</i> and <i>ir</i> ).
farewell . . . .	farwell.
fearful . . . .	furful.
fierce . . . .	furse.
hideous . . . .	hijjus.
insidious . . . .	insijjus.
innocence . . . .	innocince.
infirmity . . . .	infareimity.
leap . . . .	lep.
leisure . . . .	leasure.
melodious . . . .	melojus.
merchant . . . .	marchant.
odious . . . .	ojus.
perfidious . . . .	perfijjus (and so in all adjectives ending with <i>dious</i> ).
pierce . . . .	purse.
prudence . . . .	prudince.

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quality . . .	(the first syllable like that in the word <i>aliment</i> .)
rode . . . .	rod.
sovereign . .	suvran.
stir . . . .	stare.
thy . . . .	the.
virgin . . .	vargin.
you . . . .	ye (that is, the plural for the singular number.)
ye . . . .	<i>jee</i> , after words ending with <i>d</i> , as <i>demanjee</i> for <i>demand ye</i> ; or <i>chee</i> , after words ending with <i>t</i> , as <i>hurchee</i> for <i>hurt ye</i> .

Kemble, too, by a too strained exercise of prerogative, was unconsciously introducing an abuse which has since developed and become one of the chief causes of the decay of the stage. This is the complete prominence of one actor, the leading character of the play, and the subordination of all the rest to him. Before Garrick retired, people still were going to see, say, *The Wonder*, with Mr. Garrick in Don Felix; but before Kemble retired, playgoers went to see KEMBLE in *Coriolanus*. This has led to the "star" system, which, by a well-deserved retribution, has led to the extinction of the stars themselves. The stories as to his minute injunctions to the players, who were instructed to set off his exertions in every advantageous way, are endless. These

directions, even those as to the players' own acting and deportment, he would give even during the performance; and Scott saw a very intelligent young player much put out and disturbed by his *sotto voce* orders as to raising and lowering a sword in one of Shakspeare's plays. Much more serious were his directions to players acting with him, to forego all exertion, for fear of interfering with his proper effect. Thus, a Mrs. St. Ledger, who was acting with him in *The Mountaineers*, was severely rebuked for her excess of spirit and energy. The explanation was furnished to Leigh Hunt:—"It is well known in the theatre, that during the whole of that scene, Mrs. St. Ledger is acting in direct opposition to her common sense, that she is not permitted to stir or breathe but by Mr. Kemble's direction, that she is expressly forbid to go near him when he falls, to assist him when he rises, to kneel to him, or embrace him; in short she is obliged to appear an automaton." It is supposed that "she would disconcert or put trammels on Octavian, and by that the audience would lose in one moment from Mr. Kemble more than they would have been repaid in the whole life of Mrs. St. Ledger. We never before heard such an absurd instance of Mr. Kemble's disregard of theatrical propriety, or

such a disgusting one of his vanity: he had better send all the actors about him from the stage, in scenes of this kind, that he may have room to astonish the audience at his leisure. His conduct reminds us of an ancient fable, in which the Great Bear wished to put out all the other constellations in order to shine by itself. It is to be hoped that the public will no more receive with their usual indulgence so flagrant a violation of nature and propriety. Actors are for the audience, not the audience for the actors; and Mr. Kemble should pay a little less deference to his own conceit, and a little more to their judgment."

Another of these affectations was calling Rome "Room," though by this he was supported by the "country gentlemen" in Parliament and some old-fashioned people. But here, as Mr. Geneste says, he should have been consistent, and have spoken of "Roomans;" and he should also have considered that Shakspeare, in some passages, was against him—as in *Henry VI.*, where Cardinal Beaufort is bidden to "roam" to Rome. He insisted, too, in private conversation, on being "obleegeed," on which he was rallied by no less a person than the Prince Regent, who, with good-humoured affability, which was one

of the redeeming points of the *soi-disant* "first gentleman," asked for a pinch of snuff, and said, "Mr. Kemble, I am obleeged to you." Some elderly people, however, still observe this pronunciation. But the eccentric "aitches" must be associated with the name of Kemble alone.

He was always happiest, said a friend and admirer, when the very defects in his own character became blended with his excellences to produce a whole. And this was shown especially in his *Pierre* in "Venice Preserved," where a sort of dissolute indifference was assumed to hide ferocious designs. This suited Kemble's own manner, while Pierre's love of morbid raillery was quite in unison with the actor's own reluctant indulgence in mirth. In his *Posthumus* a little turn was noticed and admired where he changed from suspicion as to the ring—on a suggestion that it might have been stolen—and his look and tone: "Aye, very fine!" expressed a world of feeling.

So with his *Cato*. By his bearing and gaze, all the hopes of Rome seemed to be concentrated in his tower-like figure. He seemed to convey the idea of a vast dignity; he filled the stage; it spread about his figure. And this "expansion" seems to be what

is lost to modern actors. Their genius does not help them to convey those ideas of greatness and dignity. Even as they walked, it was impossible to look on the Kembles and not be impressed and elevated by their noble figures, and the gallantry and dignity of their bearing.

His *Brutus* was of the same cast; but critics objected to it there being a want of sufficient tenderness. The lugubrious *Stranger*, as a matter of course, suited him. We can almost hear him in a passage the delivery of which Mr. Boaden admired when the "old servant" resented a reproach. "Sir, that did not come from your heart." "*Forgive me!*" Kemble's look, his sigh, his tone in this ejaculation was a whole history. "When the Countess," Mr. Boaden goes on, "has put into his possession the details of her infamy, that he *may divorce himself from her polluted person*, the pause for a few seconds, the deliberate tearing of the papers, and the way in which he let them escape, rather than threw them from his hands, were so consummate a proof of his feeling and judgment, that it remains before me with no parallel in any other performance." This extravagant encomium on what is a mere actor's trick, and of which Kemble must have made small use, might incline us

to doubt his biographer's judgment. More just, however, was his praise of Kemble's greeting to his friend, "Charles," "Steinfort!" the tone of which was equally removed from either surprise or joy.

His *King Lear*, Mr. Boaden says, was magnificent on the first night, and the curse terrific. But "subsequently he was too elaborately aged, and quenched with infirmity the insane fire of the injured father. The countenance was finely made up, and in grandeur approached the most awful impersonation of Michael Angelo."

His *Othello* was grand and terrible; but again it was regulated; there was method in his fury. He never seemed to have made himself completely part of the character. It was at most a character that was finely played. Even the well known farewell of *Othello* became no more than a cold piece of declamation.

*Hamlet* was the piece in which he first obtained success: *Coriolanus* the last; and it was curious that there should have been such an inversion—a moderate performance coming first, and one of surpassing excellence last. His *Hamlet* he made more a study—a reading—than a dramatic exhibition; and from the criticisms recorded, and the sort of admiration it



excited, we can see was overlaid with ingenious "readings," the fruit of laborious studies and elaborate research. Audiences at that time were highly critical, were perfectly familiar with the best passages of a play like *Hamlet*, and a great part of their entertainment consisted in comparing the different interpretations by different actors. This supposed an education and cultivation not to be found in the Theatres of our time. *Hamlet* in itself is not a play such as, with a new actor, would carry an audience away, as *Richard III.* would; and the reason that Kemble chose it for his *début* must have been his confidence in the effects of his diligent study, and the new lights he was prepared to offer to his hearers. All the remarks, and the critiques made upon the performances, deal with these "readings." How he said, "'Tis an *unweeded* garden," instead of the vulgar, "'Tis an *unweeded* garden," on the ground that the word was quite intelligible with its own fitting accent. How he laid the accent upon *that*, in the line—

"Sir, my good *friend*, I'll change *that* name with you."

After saluting Horatio and Marcellus, he added a bow to Bernardo, meaning the "Good even, sir," for

him. "Did *you* not speak to it;" instead of "Did you not *speak* to it." There were endless refinements of this description, which it is evident were the result of long study and ingenious experiments and guesses. These were mere oddities; but what verged on clap-trap was some of his "suiting the action to the word." Thus, he gave great satisfaction by his "turning the point of the sword" from the ghost, instead of holding it towards him. So, when the two courtiers were passing out before him, Kemble checked one of them with a haughty look, and strode out himself first. John Taylor witnessed his first performance with Philips, and the latter on this burst out with, "O fine! O fine!" "Yes," said his companion; "but what does it mean?" The other said he could not tell, but it was fine!—thus representing a good deal of popular criticism. Then his offer of the pipe to Rosencrantz, after Guildenstern, "I do beseech *you*," which was accompanied by a stately crossing over to the former, belongs to a class of "reading" that seems petty and quite below the dignity of Shakespeare. "Is it the king?" in the closet scene, was addressed not to the queen, but to himself. He knelt as he conjured his mother to "lay not the flattering unction to her soul." This exclamation as to

Ophelia's dead body was in a tone of surprise—"What, the fair Ophelia!" But Mr. Boaden long after reminded him of the singular tenderness and regret Henderson threw into it, and Kemble at once adopted it. After "He was a man, take him for all in all," he as it were "broke down," and uttered the next line overwhelmed with grief. Both are generally given in a firm declaratory manner, almost like a challenge. But Kemble's view is merely fanciful. So, too, was his tearing the leaf of the book when he told Polonius that he was reading "slanders, sir,"—which was purely arbitrary, and on a nice examination would be pronounced opposed to Hamlet's character. More ridiculous was his pronouncing the word "lisp" to Ophelia *with* a lisp. His emphasis in "Ay, in my heart of hearts," on the "of," was surely a mistake. Garrick, however, laid it on the second "heart," which seems only a little less faulty. The true emphasis would seem to be on the first "heart."

The fine picture of him in this play, by Lawrence, at South Kensington, is certainly the most interesting and romantic portrait of him that we have, and it gives a good idea of the sepulchral, ruminatory cast he threw over his conception of the character. And certainly, applying the principle laid down by his

critics, that he was at home in characters which were under the influence of one dominant passion or feeling, Hamlet might seem to fall within the list of his successes. But it was almost too intellectual, and scarcely belonged to this category; while the temptation to overlay it with "readings" and dramatic "comment" was certain to give the character a pedantic and laboured air. Scott's remark on this point is judicious. He said that Hamlet's natural fixed melancholy placed him within Kemble's range; yet that many delicate and sudden turns of his passion slipped through his fingers. He happily described him as "a lordly vessel, goodly and magnificent, when going well before the wind, *but wanting facility to go about.*" This was Kemble's failing: he wanted the easy facility of "going about."

"There he was," wrote Hazlitt, the year of Kemble's death, "the sweet, the graceful, the gentlemanly Hamlet. The scholar's eye shone in him with learned beauty; the soldier's spirit decorated his person. . . . The beauty of his performance was its retrospective air: its intensity and abstraction. His youth seemed delivered over to sorrow. . . . Later actors have played the part with more energy, walked more in the sun—dashed more at effects, piqued them-

selves more on the girth of a foil ; but Kemble's *sensible, lonely Hamlet* has not been surpassed."

Mrs. Siddons, however, considered that Charles Kemble's conception of Hamlet quite equalled that of his brother, though the power to execute was wanting.

Sir Giles Overreach was a character he ought never to have attempted. Sir Walter Scott said, justly enough, that it was like an angry country gentleman of the day. It wanted bustle, ferociousness, madness. Allowing for the severity and prejudices of Hazlitt, the following is something after the fashion in which he played it :—

"The outrageousness of the conduct of Sir Giles is only to be excused by the violence of his passions and the turbulence of his character. Mr. Kemble inverted this conception, and attempted to reconcile the character by softening down the action. He 'aggravated the part so that he would seem like any sucking dove.' For example, nothing could exceed the coolness and *sang-froid* with which he raps Marall on the head with his cane, or spits at Lord Lovell : Lord Foppington himself never did any commonplace indecency more insipidly. The only passage that pleased us, or that really called forth the powers of the actor, was his reproach to Mr. Justice Greedy :

‘There is some fury in that *Gut*.’ The indignity of the word called up all the dignity of the actor to meet it, and he guaranteed the word, though ‘a word of naught,’ according to the letter and spirit of the convention between them, with a good grace, in the true old English way. Either we mistake all Mr. Kemble’s excellences, or they all disqualify him for this part. Sir Giles *hath a devil*; Mr. Kemble has none. Sir Giles is in a passion; Mr. Kemble is not. Sir Giles has no regard to appearances; Mr. Kemble has. It has been said of the Venus de Medicis, ‘So stands the statue that enchants the world;’ the same might have been said of Mr. Kemble.”

Even the conventional image of King John would prepare us for something remorseful, agitated, full of changing colour. It was said that he was cold and artificial. Again, though prejudiced against Hazlitt’s unsparing severity, there is a something in his description which we cannot refuse to accept, and which those who have followed Kemble’s *Life* must feel to be more or less accurate :—

“We went to see Mr. Kemble’s King John, and he became the part so well, in costume, look, and gesture, that if left to ourselves, we could have gone to sleep over it, and dreamt that it was fine, and ‘when

we waked, have cried to dream again.' But we were told that it was really fine, as fine as Garrick, as fine as Mrs. Siddons, as fine as Shakspeare; so we rubbed our eyes and kept a sharp look-out, but we saw nothing but a deliberate intention on the part of Mr. Kemble to act the part finely. And so he did in a certain sense, but not by any means as Shakspeare wrote it, nor as it might be played. He did not harrow up the feelings, he did not electrify the sense: he did not enter into the nature of the part himself, nor, consequently, move others with terror or pity. The introduction to the scene with Hubert was certainly excellent: you saw instantly, and before a syllable was uttered, partly from the change of countenance, and partly from the arrangement of the scene, the purpose which had entered his mind to murder the young prince. But the remainder of this trying scene, though the execution was elaborate—painfully elaborate, and the outline well conceived—wanted the filling up, the true and master touches, the deep, piercing, heartfelt tones of nature. It was done well and skilfully, *according to the book of arithmetic*; but no more. Mr. Kemble, when he approaches Hubert to sound his disposition, puts on an insidious, insinuating, fawning aspect, and so he ought; but we think



it should not be, though it was, that kind of wheedling smile, as if he was going to persuade him that the business he wished him to undertake was a mere jest, and his natural repugnance to it an idle prejudice that might be carried off by a certain pleasant drollery of eye and manner. Mr. Kemble's look, to our apprehension, was exactly as if he had just caught the eye of some person of his acquaintance in the boxes, and was trying to suppress a rising smile at the metamorphosis he had undergone since dinner. Again, he changes his voice three several times, in repeating the name of Hubert ; and the changes might be fine, but they did not vibrate on our feelings, so we cannot tell. They appeared to us like a tragic *voluntary*. Through almost the whole scene this celebrated actor did not seem to feel the part itself as it was set down for him, but to be considering how he ought to feel it, or how he should express by rule and method what he did not feel. He was sometimes slow, and sometimes hurried : sometimes familiar, and sometimes solemn : but always with an evident design and determination to be so. The varying tide of passion did not appear to burst from the source of nature in his breast, but to be drawn from a theatrical leaden cistern, and then directed through certain conduit-

pipes and artificial channels, to fill the audience with well-regulated and harmless sympathy."

We might be almost inclined to suppose that Rolla—the ranting hero of *Pizarro*—may have been his most successful and effective character. The extraordinary favour and enthusiasm with which it was received—the bustle and excitement of the piece—the good openings for speeches and general elocution—carried him away in spite of himself, and overbore all his usual slow art and meditated effects. In this piece he fought, carried a child over a bridge, and performed all the chivalrous acts which have since fallen into the department of the transpontine stage. And yet, granting that he was to condescend to this inferior line of character, and to declaim the fustian set down for him, it must be admitted that nothing could have suited him more exactly. His fine, noble figure, his elasticity of limb, his own heroic cast of mind, the field for elocution, the absence of any opening for the display of elaborate "readings"—these elements helped to make the part one of the most effective of his whole list. Still we may commiserate this great thinker and actor for having to expend this talent and energy on such frantic stuff as the following:—

“My brave associates, partners of my toil, my feelings and my fame! Can Rolla’s words add vigour to the virtuous energies which inspire your hearts? No, you have judged as I have, the foulness of the crafty plea by which these bold invaders would delude you. Your generous spirit has compared, as mine has, the motives which in a war like this can animate *their* minds and *ours*. *They*, by a strange frenzy driven, fight for power, for plunder, and extended rule. *We* for our country, our altars, and our homes. *They* follow an adventurer whom they fear, and obey a power which they hate. *We* serve a monarch whom we love—a god whom we adore. Where’er they move in anger, desolation tracks their progress! Where’er they pause in amity, affliction mourns their friendship! They boast they come but to improve our state, enlarge our thoughts, and free us from the yoke of error! Yes, *they* will give enlightened freedom to *our* minds, who are themselves the slaves of passion, avarice, and pride! They offer us their protection. Yes, such protection as vultures give to lambs—covering and devouring them! They call on us to barter all of good we have inherited and proved, for the desperate chance of something better which they promise. Be our plain answer this—the throne we honour is the *people’s choice*, the laws we

reverence are our brave fathers' legacy—the faith we follow teaches us to live in bonds of charity with all mankind, and *die*, with hope of bliss beyond the grave. Tell your invaders this, and tell them, too, we seek no change, and least of all, such change as *they* would bring us.”

Of his *Gamester* we have no accurate account; and Mr. Boaden has nothing to say of it beyond some excellent reflections on the evils of gaming.\*

“His Cato,” wrote Hazlitt in his more enthusiastic mood, “was magnificent. The hopes of Rome seemed fixed upon him and his tower-like person. His Brutus was too meditative. Coriolanus’s contempt of inferiors suited the haughty tone of his voice. The crowd of mob Romans fell back as though they had run against a wild bull; and he dashed in among them in scarlet pride. His Richard was too collected. In King John his death chilled the heart; his voice

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\* Boaden and Murphy had congenial minds, and both were fond of “pointing a moral” on the most inappropriate text and in the most strangely inflated language. The former had great opportunities for observation, yet it is to be deplored that he should avail himself of Kemble’s appearance in the *Gamester* to deliver extraordinary platitudes.

had a horror, or hollowness supernatural, and it still sounds through our memories big with death."

But as we have seen in the case of his sister, he also had his two classes of character—the heroic and the melodramatic. But it is conceded that the "Roman" characters, such as that of Cato, Brutus, Coriolanus, were those in which he excelled. A little reflection would show why they were so; for such a character always supposed a kind of heroic temper grafted on the natural feelings, and which controlled them; there was thus a double nature. This was actually Kemble's habitual style of acting; and even those mannerisms which caused amusement—those pauses which Sheridan jocosely recommended should be filled up with music—had, in this view, a certain appropriateness, as if he were collecting strength to overcome natural weakness.

There were a number of minor characters in romantic dramas, poor parts with Italian names, which he had a fancy for playing. All the great actors seem to have been fond of such experiments—Mrs. Siddons, Garrick, Kean, and Kemble, have associated their names with a number of obscure characters utterly unfamiliar to the playgoer, or even play-reader, of our day. He was considered to add a new

dignity to the hackneyed part of Gloucester, in Jane Shore,\* and his Prospero was a fine elocutionary exercise. His Richard Cœur de Lion was chivalrous. But it is hard to think of him as a Cleombrotus, a Huniades, a Pirithous, and Sextus.

But, as has been universally agreed, his Coriolanus must have been a unique performance. A "gallant impetuosity" characterized it—even when he entered first, and the mob cleared away before him, "as he dashed in among them, and looked in the eyes of the audience sufficient to beat forty of them."† This sort of "air," it must be said again, belongs to the genius of acting, and is quite forgotten by our present actors. Hazlitt, too, spoke of the "loose of strength" that distinguished this famous part.

"It is the cant" (he wrote warmly on this occasion), "to say that Mr. Kemble has quite fallen off of late—that he is not what he was: he may have fallen off, in the opinion of some jealous admirers, because he is no longer in exclusive possession of the stage, but in himself he has not fallen off a jot. Why then do we approve of his retiring? Because we do not wish him

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\* Dr. Doran.

† Annual Biography.

to wait till it is *necessary* for him to retire. On the last evening, he displayed the same excellences, and gave the same prominence to the very same passages, that he used to do. We might refer to his manner of doing obeisance to his mother in the triumphal procession in the second act, and to the scene with Aufidius in the last act, as among the most striking instances. The action with which he accompanied the proud taunt to Aufidius—

“ Like an eagle in a dove-cote, I  
Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli;  
Alone I did it—”

gave double force and beauty to the image. Again, where he waits for the coming of Aufidius in his rival's house, he stood at the foot of the statue of Mars, himself another Mars! In the reconciliation scene with his mother, which is the finest in the play, he was not equally impressive. Perhaps this was not the fault of Mr. Kemble, but of the stage itself, which can hardly do justice to such thoughts and sentiments as here occur.

“ My mother bows  
As if Olympus to a mole-hill should  
In supplication nod.”

“ Mr. Kemble's voice seemed to faint and stagger,



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to be strained and cracked, under the weight of this majestic image; but, indeed, we know of no tones deep or full enough to bear along the swelling tide of sentiment it conveys; nor can we conceive anything in outward form to answer to it, except when Mrs. Siddons played the part of Volumnia."

Much more could be said on this interesting subject; but sufficient has been collected here to illustrate the style of this great actor.

## CHAPTER THE LAST.

## THE KEMBLE FAMILY.

OVER the remaining few years of Mrs. Siddons's life there is no need to linger. Her life, after her departure from the stage, would have little interest for the public. It was noted that age dealt with her very lightly, and she was always considered to look many years younger than she really was. Her seventy-second birthday was spent with her friends the Darnleys, at their place in Kent, where she found Prince Leopold "a very agreeable and sensible converser," and where the Duchess of Kent seemed to "justify all the opinions of her amiability." The anniversary was celebrated handsomely there.

To the end of her life she took the old affectionate interest in her family—was affected to tears of joy at the success of her niece, Miss Fanny Kemble, on the stage, whose *début* she witnessed—and was long before recovering the loss of her son George's children, who had to go out to join their parents. But

all this while her infirmities were increasing; she was tortured with her old complaint, erysipelas, the symptoms of which became more and more distressing. At last, in the month of April, 1831, when she was seventy-six years old, these attacks became virulent, and settled in one of her ankles; but she was skilfully treated by Mr. Bushell, her medical adviser, and in a short time was so well that she said gaily, that "she had now health to sell." But on one bleak morning she incautiously ventured out and caught cold. This brought back the malady, which settled in both her legs. Fever then followed—her state became gradually worse—after only a few weeks' illness her strength began to fail, and in much suffering, on the morning of the 8th of June, about nine o'clock, she expired. The greatest of English actresses, and one of the best actresses of Europe—after a mixed life of struggle and success, of glory and mortification, had passed to rest. No actress, certainly, of our stage, offers a more engaging story, more modesty, more affection, and more unselfishness—virtues, too, combined with surpassing gifts. These, in but too many dispositions, might have engendered a vanity or arrogance, which would have overpowered the former. In her calm modera-

tion, her vivaciousness, and tempered gaiety, her superiority to petty feeling, she suggests a comparison with her fancied enemy Garrick—a compliment, as her detractors might insist, enough to make her “turn in her grave.” In this view, she is far beyond her brother John, as the reader, who has followed this history so far, will be inclined to pronounce her story infinitely more interesting than his.

She was interred on June 15th, in the new burial-ground at Paddington, and was attended to the grave by the performers of both the Patent theatres, who filled more than a dozen mourning-coaches. She left particular instructions that only a plain slab should be placed over her remains, with a text chosen by herself:—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF

SARAH SIDDONS,

Who departed this life June 8, 1831, in her 76th year.

*“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”\**

The remains of this great woman do not rest in

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\* Within Paddington Church is a slab to her memory, with the text, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” She left by her will a sum of about 35,000*l.* Of this she bequeathed 500*l.* to “her beloved and truly affectionate friend,” Miss Martha Wilkinson, with some furniture. To her daughter Cecilia she left all her furniture,

Westminster Abbey, where those of so many inferior players are laid. A plain slab, in a squalid burial-ground, was for a long time the only monument of her glories. A statue of her brother, by Hinchcliffe, from a sketch by Flaxman, was duly subscribed for, and after being placed on a very unsuitable site in the north transept, was in 1865 moved to one more worthy of it. Though the design of so great an artist, Mrs. Siddons was dissatisfied, and, in her vehement way, condemned it. "I cannot help thinking," she wrote to her friend Mrs. FitzHugh, "with sorrow, of the statue of my poor brother. It is an absolute libel on his noble person and air; I should like

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plate, jewels, books, carriages, and all her money in the house and in bank. To Mrs. Charles Kemble the portrait of Charles, painted by Clark. To Mrs. Frances Twiss 20*l.* for a ring. To Mrs. Anne Hatton she continued the annuity of 20*l.* which she had enjoyed for many years. To her inestimable and beloved friend Mrs. Charlotte FitzHugh a mourning ring. The mulberry tree ink-stand and the pseudo-Shakspearian gloves she bequeathed to her son and daughter. The rest of her property she left to her son George, to her daughter Cecilia, and to her daughter-in-law Harriet, widow of her son, Henry Siddons, and children. But if these should dispute their father's will (which we may suppose they were inclined to do) they were to forfeit all claims to her bequest. These shares would be about 10,000*l.* each. The will was made in the year 1815, and the executors were Mr. J. Kemble and Mr. Horace Twiss. On her brother's death she named Mr. W. Meyrick.

to pound it into dust, and scatter it to the winds.”\* What her countrymen should have done for the greater sister, it was reserved for Mr. Macready to supply; and, at his own cost, he placed a fine statue of Mrs. Siddons, from the chisel of Chantrey, beside that of Kemble, thus honouring the dead, the profession, and perhaps most of all, himself.

Such is the history of SARAH SIDDONS and JOHN KEMBLE, and in bringing it to a close, the promise of the title may be fairly considered as accomplished. The life of Charles Kemble was uneventful, and even uninteresting, save to a large circle of friends, many of whom survive. The great success of his brother and sister had made everything smooth for him. He had no struggles to endure; he was not obliged “to fight his way,” as they had done. A place was found for him almost at once, at a great theatre; and though he was thus favoured, he had the wisdom to use this advantage as an opportunity for diligent study and training, and fairly worked his way up to a special position in which he had no rival. It is, after

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\* Of all the freaks in marble to be found in the Abbey collection, none is more singular than this. The Christian artist is exhibited with the dress and bearing of the Pagan Cato!

all, a false principle which leads the public to look for "stars," and to consider those only as great actors who can play the conventional round of characters—Othello, Macbeth, Richard, Hamlet, and the like. When the drama is flourishing, a great player should find equal reputation who can minister to the completeness of the representation by devoting himself to parts of the second order, but which are indeed almost as important as those of the first. This it is that has formed the magnificent reputation of the Comédie Française, in which there is a sort of level of excellence, and from which we take away, not the impression of a single "star," but of a *play* finely acted in all its parts. On these excellent principles Charles Kemble made his reputation.

His first appearance, as we have seen, was on April 21st, 1794, at the opening of Drury Lane Theatre, when he appeared as Malcolm. From that night he devoted himself to the study of parts of the same character, those marked by chivalry and a free and generous gallantry. Cassio, and Faulconbridge, and Mercutio he made his own, "in that he walked, spoke, looked, fought, and died like a gentleman," said Dr. Doran, who had often seen him in the part. His Laertes was full of a fiery passion; his Bassanio



of a winning grace. He was considered to have mastered the secret of refined classical humour. His Doricourt was charming, full of a joyous carelessness. Characters like Mercutio and Petruchio, it was truly said, he restored to elegant comedy ; for hitherto they had been treated by second-class players after a coarse and roystering fashion. His Mirabel, a delightfully airy part, he made perfectly fascinating from the gaiety and good spirits he threw into the character, and at the close he would bound into the air in an ecstasy of enjoyment at being saved from a predicament.\*

His brother's gift of the share in the theatre, valued at 50,000*l.*, proved a disastrous one. The great house never prospered, though he attempted revivals, with pompous and costly pageants. In one year, 1832, it had nearly brought him to ruin ; and before the season was over, the partners counted on losing a sum of nearly 20,000*l.* Mr. Planché, whose name is associated with so much that is pleasant in the drama, was his warm friend, and received hearty encouragement at his hands.†

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\* Dr. Doran saw him in this part, and thought this jubilation a little overdone.

† See some agreeable "Recollections" of his, now being published in the "London Society" magazine.

He retired from the stage in December, 1836, though a short time afterwards he returned to play a few nights. This *rentrée*, it was understood, was for the entertainment of the Princess Victoria and the Duchess of Kent, who had expressed a wish to see him. This complaisance to the great was always a weakness of the family, and Mrs. Siddons' similar compliment to the Princess Charlotte seemed to show him an example. But his final appearance was on the occasion of his daughter Fanny Kemble's benefit, on April 10th, 1840.

Mr. Adolphus describes him at Mr. Barham's, skilfully trying to disguise his persistent deafness, and talking in a low, animated voice. He had the art of letting his face fall so as to convey the idea of extreme old age and wretchedness. His affection and admiration for his great brother were always remarkable; and he owned that, when acting Cassio to his brother's Othello, when the latter said—"I do believe it; and I ask your pardon"—it always made him weep.

He enjoyed the office of Examiner of Plays, which was for him a sort of sinecure, as he discharged it by deputy. He died on November 12th, 1854. He left two daughters,—Adelaide, who made a reputation

in opera in the character of Norma, but who soon left the stage to marry Mr. Sartoris; the other, Fanny, at present Mrs. Butler, chiefly distinguished for classical readings, and who has written some pleasant American Journals. His son, John Mitchell Kemble, became remarkable for talents of quite a different order, and his studies in Philology have given him a respectable reputation among savans. He died in Dublin, and is buried there.

Charles's wife, Miss Maria Theresa Decamp, is a singularly interesting figure in the line of actresses, and, with her foreign piquancy and grace, suggests a general resemblance to that Eva Maria Violette who became Mrs. Garrick. Like her, she came from Vienna, was a dancer like her, and like her married a classical English actor of good position. The charming engraving of her in the Burney Collection shows what a graceful and piquant actress she was. She surmounted the difficulties of learning English, became an actress, and learned music. She married Charles Kemble in 1806. She left the stage in 1819, but returned for one night for the purpose of introducing her daughter Fanny, when she played The Nurse to the *débutante's* Juliet. She contributed the lively *Day after the Wedding* to the list of acting

plays which still keep the stage. Her husband could adapt with tolerable skill from the French and German. She died on September 3rd, 1838, at Chertsey, being sixty-five years old. A sister of hers was also on the stage, and figures a good deal in Mathews's "Memoirs;" while a brother went to America, where, according to a familiar biographic notice of the family, "he united the occupation of cowkeeper and actor."

Mrs. John Kemble survived her husband many years, and reached to a great age. She could boast, for a time, that she was the oldest member of Garrick's company, and finally could add to this boast that she was the only one surviving. She retired to Leamington, where she became well known, and was much sought for her lively conversation and agreeable recollections. Her charities were remarkable. She reached the patriarchal age of ninety, and died on May 13th, 1845. Two years later her husband's old house, at 89, Russell Street, was purchased, and pulled down to make room for the enlargement of the Museum. A great portion of her income seems to have been in the shape of annuities for her own and her husband's lives. Her remains were brought to Guy's Cliff, the seat

of Mrs. Siddons' early mistress, Mrs. Greathead, and laid in the family vault—the Hon. C. Bertie Percy, coming down specially to see this arrangement carried out. Thus should the true artist, who has cherished the dignity of her profession, be honoured. She left no children by her first or second husband.

As it will be interesting to know what descendants of Mrs. Siddons now survive, I give the following list, with which her grandson, Mr. Cox, has supplied me:—

1. Her son *George* was long in India. He died a good many years ago. A daughter of his married the late eminent Oriental scholar, Horace Hayman Wilson, Professor of Sanscrit at Oxford. Several of their daughters are married—one (Harriett) to Robert Tait, Esq., 14, Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square; and another (Maria) to Lieutenant-Colonel Carl Alexander von Zglinitzki, of the Prussian army, who fought in the late Franco-German war, but escaped unhurt.
2. Her son *Henry* came to Edinburgh about 1808, and managed the Theatre Royal till his death. He married Miss Harriett Murray, who was an excellent actress, and much respected personally, and was intimate with the literary circles there. Their family consisted of—
  1. A son, named Henry, who was some time in India, and at his death left a daughter, Sarah, who survives, and, so far as I remember, is unmarried.
  2. Sarah, now wife of William Patrick Grant of Rothiemurchus. (They have no issue).
  3. Elizabeth Harriet, of Edinburgh, widow of Major Arthur Mair, who died some years ago. Their children are—

1. William Crosbie Siddons Mair, Major in the —th Regiment of Foot (now at Carlisle).
  2. Elizabeth Mair.
  3. Helen Mair.
  4. Harriett Mair.
  5. Sally Mair. (These five children are unmarried).
3. Her daughter *Cecilia* married George Combe, Writer to the Signet, Edinburgh, in 1833. Of Mr. Combe and his writings (the best known of which is his treatise on "The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects") there is a biographical sketch in Chambers's "Encyclopædia."
4. Another daughter, *Sarah*, who died in 1803, unmarried, before the marriage of Mrs. Combe.
5. *Maria*. Died 1798.

Mrs. Scott Siddons is a grand-daughter of George Siddons, first above-mentioned.

Professor Wilson and his wife had also the following daughters, who survive, and perhaps others now deceased :—Mrs. Cecilia Wilson, or Faulder, wife of Robert Faulder, Esq.; Elizabeth Hannah Wilson, Martha Wilson, and Frances Wilson.

A daughter of *George Siddons*, Sarah, is wife, or widow, of William R. Young, Esq., formerly of Oldfield Lodge, near Maidenhead, and afterwards of Florence.

John Kemble was an industrious writer, and his productions fill many folio pages of the British Museum Catalogue. The following may be con-

sidered a fairly complete list, if not absolutely complete :—

Fugitive Pieces. 1780.

Belisarius, a Tragedy. Never Printed. Acted at York 1778.

Female Officer. Acted at York 1779; afterwards acted at Drury Lane, 1786, under title of Female Projects. Never Printed.

Macbeth Reconsidered. 1786.

Macbeth and King Richard the Third. 1817.

Lodoiska. Translated from the French. 1794.

Oh, 'tis Impossible. Altered from Comedy of Errors. Never Printed.

Pannel. Farce, altered from Bickerstaff. 1788.

Farm House. Altered from Charles Johnston's Country Lasses. 1789.

Love in Many Masks. Altered from Mrs. Behn. 1790.

Programme of Alexander the Great. A Pantomime. Mr. Lee. 1795.

Celadon and Florimel. Altered from Cibber, 1796. Never Printed.

Shakespeare. Adapted versions:  
All's Well that ends Well.  
As you Like it.

Cymbeline.

Coriolanus.

Comedy of Errors.

Henry IV. Parts 1 and 2.

Henry V. and Henry VIII.

Hamlet.

Julius Cæsar.

King Lear.

King John.

Katherine and Petruchio.

Merchant of Venice.

Merry Wives of Windsor.

Much Ado about Nothing.

Macbeth.

Measure for Measure.

Othello.

Richard III.

Romeo and Juliet.

Tempest.

Twelfth Night.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Winter's Tale.

Isabella.

Fair Penitent.

Jane Shore.

Cato.

Double Dealer.

De Montfort.

False Friend.

Maid of Honour.

(These three not printed).



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New Way to Pay Old Debts.	Way of the World.
Plain Dealer.	Holcroft's Follies of the Day.
Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.	Lee's Mithridates.
The Revenge.	Gamester.
Venice Preserved.	Grecian Daughter.

A very full list of Kemble's and Mrs. Siddons's characters, with the years in which they were played, will be found in Mr. Geneste's "History of the English Stage."



## APPENDIX.

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### *Farewell Dinner to Kemble.—Talma.*

THIS celebration was, after all, indiscreetly managed, and gave rise to some ridicule. Nearly all the speeches were in bad taste; but the one that embodied Mrs. Siddons's thanks for her health's being proposed, excited the most comment. Her nephew, Mr. Twiss, replied in her name, announcing that he did so "at the special desire of Mrs. Siddons." "I will only add," such was his conclusion, "that if there be terms which can more forcibly and feelingly than others convey to such an auditory the deep sense which Mrs. Siddons will always entertain of the honour and kindness now conferred upon her, *these are the terms*, which, could she herself have been present, she would have selected to express the thanks I but attempt to offer so imperfectly in her name." This confused platitude was less absurd than the announcement of having been formally deputed to return thanks for what is conveniently accepted as an impromptu honour. To the end Mrs. Siddons was always to exhibit this want of tact.

Talma's speech, delivered in English, was excellent; but on his return to France he was fiercely attacked for some supposed depreciation of his own country. It was as follows:—

"GENTLEMEN,—It is impossible for me, in a foreign language, to express my warm gratitude for the hospitable way in which you have this day received me—(applause)—and for the honour you have done, in my person, to the French Stage. To be thought worthy of notice on an occa-

sion consecrated to my dear friend Kemble—(shouts of applause)—I estimate as one of the highest honours of my life. As I cannot thank you with my tongue, you will, I hope, suffer me to thank you with my heart—(plaudits). Gentlemen, permit me to drink ‘Success to the British stage.’”—(Thunders of applause.)

On his return he had to justify himself in the following letter:—

“SIR,—I learn, upon my return from England, that, on the credit of certain journals, I am publicly assailed with reproaches, of which I feel it my duty to take immediate notice.

“It is pretended that I wished to smuggle into Calais some articles of English merchandise, which were seized. In answer to this I have only to say that the accusation is wholly unfounded. My effects were examined with much politeness by the custom-house officers of Calais, who did not discover that in any respect I had contravened the laws.

“The second accusation which is brought against me is of a nature more serious; and the high value I attach to the esteem of the public—an object to which the whole efforts of my life have been devoted—the duty I owe to my friends and to myself, make it imperative upon me to justify myself in this particular more explicitly.

“After the last representation of Mr. John Kemble, the first actor of the English Theatre, as justly dear for his noble character as for his rare talents, his friends and admirers assembled at a farewell dinner, in order to testify to him in a striking manner their attachment and regret. The greatest noblemen, the most distinguished artists and men of letters, were present. According to the English custom, toasts were given; and in the midst of three or four hundred persons at table, and of a great number of spectators, it was thought proper to render me an object of particular distinction. The

noble lord who was president of the *fête*, proposed a toast to my honour, and to the glory of the French Stage. I replied by some phrases which were graciously received, and in which I endeavoured to express my gratitude for the reception, so full of kindness, which I had experienced, and my wishes for the prosperity of the English Theatre. This return of politeness was, in a manner, a duty which the most severe observer of propriety could not condemn.

“Some English journals which have not reported with scrupulous exactness the extempore speeches at this assembly, have not given mine more correctly than others, and the French papers, in translating them, have not shown greater fidelity.

“To join a political wish to the toast I proposed, in the midst of persons who merely assembled to celebrate the arts, and to honour particularly my own profession, would have been, to say the least, a folly; to forget in the same situation that I was a Frenchman, would have been something more than absence of mind; and this double unsuitableness would have been tacitly blamed even by those to whom I addressed myself.

“I am delighted to make known the reception, truly fraternal, which I experienced from the artists of London—the flattering distinctions, the eager attentions of which I have been the object in the highest classes of society; but the profound gratitude which I feel for the testimonies of affection and esteem—honourable alike to the French Theatre and to myself—has never made and never will make me forget that sentiment without a rival, the predilection which every good man owes to the country of his birth.”

Talma indeed admired his dear friend, though not indiscriminately. He used to liken his face to that of Isaiah. When money was being collected for a statue, he wrote an

affectionate letter, which is given in Mr. Julian Young's memoir of his father :—

“ Nous avons, donc, perdu ce pauvre Kemble. On doit qu'on doit lui un monument par souscription. J'ai chargé Mons. Darby de me faire mettre au nombre des souscripteurs. Il est de mon devoir de lui donner cette distincte marque de la sincère amitié que j'avois pour sa personne, et de la haute admiration que je professois pour son talent. Je reconnois là vos compatriotes, mon cher ami.”

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*Portraits of Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble.*

The wonderful brother and sister live again on many a canvas. No two artists have ever been so frequently painted or engraved. Theatrical performers have always been a favourite subject with artists, for, from frequent playing, their features acquire a certain character and expression, and where there is found dramatic genius, there comes also an irresistible impulse to try and preserve some record of the features which have such a magical power. Now there are no theatrical portraits painted; the vulgar photograph is considered a sufficient memorial. Yet if we turn over the wonderful Burney collection in the British Museum, and compare the legions of players there seen engraved in the most exquisite fashion—their faces full of expression, thought, comic vivacity, and vigour, with the tame artificial portraits now in shop windows—though these even are done “in character,” as it is called—we shall admit what has been so often insisted on, that photography is outside the domain of art.

No players have received so much of this homage as Mrs. Siddons and her brother. Much of this was owing, of course, to their noble cast of face—their grand and dignified expression,

which on canvas, even in inferior hands, was sure to be effective. The numbers of paintings and of prints is inconceivable. The portfolios in the print room at the Museum overflow with pictures of the great artists—and some mezzotints, those of Kemble especially, are on a scale of magnificence both as to size and execution, as would astonish the world now-a-days. A perfect list would be almost impossible; but as a sort of homage to the genius of these remarkable players, I have tried to see as many as possible, and to make the catalogue nearly complete.

We have already considered the “Tragic Muse,” Sir Joshua’s *chef d’œuvre*, and which, in truth, is as much an ideal, as a real, composition. How shall we describe the matchless and brilliant Gainsborough, now one of the chief glories of the National Gallery. It would require the glowing style of Mr. Ruskin to give even a faint idea of the beauties of this incomparable picture. Here has been one of the *indirect* results of the great art she followed—the enriching us with two of the finest portraits in the world. It was surely a triumph to have been painted by three such artists as Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Lawrence; but to have furnished such a piece as the “Tragic Muse,” Reynolds’s masterpiece, and to have inspired Gainsborough with the lovely and graceful work that hangs in our national collection, is an honour on which she might plume herself, apart from all histrionic considerations. But this, as I have shown, when speaking of the “Tragic Muse,” is only the luxuriance and riches of true art—not only artistic in itself, but the cause of art in others.

She is represented sitting, in a sort of walking dress, her face three quarter view. A black velvet hat, with a rich plume of black feathers and a broad leaf, is set on at one side with the most coquettish effect. The wig is powdered, and clusters about her neck in ringlets. The face is exquisitely transparent



—full of a calm and intellectual repose. But in her dress the painter must have revelled—it being of the true vivid Gainsborough blue, delicately striped in that colour, with a sort of amber mantle cast over her shoulders, a brown muff thrown carelessly on her knees, while a black string round her neck fastens on the hat, and gives an artful relief. The face seems a little sharper than we might suppose, and placing it beside that of the “Tragic Muse,” this defect becomes more apparent. The idea too of Gainsborough’s picture seems to have been suggested by Lawrence’s early sketch. In both pictures she is shown in hat and feathers, but it is evident that Gainsborough had dressed her for the occasion in the colours most effective for his brush; for on no other occasion do we see her so brilliantly and tastefully attired. The whole is as fresh as on the day it was painted, with, in addition, an exquisite mellowness.

The following is a list, but does not claim to be complete, of the paintings and engravings of Sir Thomas Lawrence:—

Drawing in coloured crayons, three-quarter face, black hat and plume, and brown riding spencer.	
Done at Bath . . . . .	MR. LAWRENCE.
Full length, in a white dress, short waist. At South Kensington . . . . .	SIR T. LAWRENCE.
Another three-quarter length . . . . .	Ditto.
A large drawing, round hat, plume in front, a band under the chin—very reflective in expression.	
Engraved by Nichol . . . . .	Ditto.
As “Zara,” finely engraved in mezzo. By Smith, after	Ditto.

There is also a curious little engraving “after a drawing by Master Lawrence,” at Bath. The number of times she sat to him for sketches, drawings, paintings, &c., is inconceivable.

As Isabella in the *Grecian Daughter*—a fine tragical picture, by Hamilton. A portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, by Gabriel Stuart. She also sat to Shirreff, but with

this picture she was dissatisfied. She also modelled a medallion of herself, which seems a good likeness and has other merits.

Hone also painted a portrait which was engraved by Bartolozzi. In her own possession there was a "crayon painting" (artist unknown), but which was engraved. Miss Boyle, afterwards Lady O'Neil, also painted her. This was also engraved. There was a drawing by Brown, which was in the possession of John Horne. She sat to Sherwin in 1782, and he himself engraved the picture, and dedicated it to the gentlemen of the bar; also to Stothard, who painted her in many theatrical characters. To Ramberg, De Wilde, and many more. Some of these latter, which were meant to adorn editions of plays, are remarkable for their delicacy of execution and spirit. Dr. Burney made a drawing of her, and collected a vast number of vignettes, engravings, and sketches, which are to be seen in the British Museum.

The engravings of John Kemble are magnificent—his fine face lending itself to the soft richness of mezzotint with singular effect. Like his sister, he sat many times to Lawrence, who was far more successful with him. The following are the most remarkable:—

A fine portrait painted in 1825. Another painted about 1814. But the most magnificent is the well-known "Hamlet" which hangs in the collection at South Kensington. The subject seems to have inspired Lawrence, for it has more force and vigour than any of his productions. The expression and dignity is remarkable, and the whole forms a portrait which it would be impossible to pass by. It has also that valuable merit in the portrait of a remarkable man—viz., its conveying that he *was* remarkable. He painted him also as Cato, and as Rolla, in a rather melodramatic attitude. There is a crayon drawing of him from the same hand, which is given in the present work. He sat to Gabriel Stuart for a tame portrait, to be seen in the National Portrait Gallery, also to Sir

Martin Shee, an engraving of which forms the frontispiece to the second volume of this work. Hamilton painted him in Richard III., as did also Gabriel Stuart. Shirreff also painted him. Boaden drew him in Hotspur, and Bourgeois painted a fine equestrian portrait of him in the same character. Boydell painted him as the Count of Narbonne, which was engraved in Dublin, by Allen. He also sat to Sir R. K. Porter, for a personification of Tragedy with a Bowl, &c., to Hounson as the Stranger, to Sir William Beechy, to Harlow, and to Harding, who did a pretty etching of him as the Count of Montevale. He was also painted with Talma, and the result is a noble pair of heads. He besides furnished innumerable spirited little vignettes to Ramberg, De Wilde, Stothard, and a host of others. His bust has been taken by Gibson—not, we may presume, the famous sculptor of the name.

The other members of the family furnished painters with good subjects. There are some charming pictures of the graceful and piquant Miss De Camp in character, in *Jenny's Return*. Mrs. Kemble has been engraved as Miss Hopkins, and Charles and the Misses Kemble sketched again and again by Lawrence.

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